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Methods and Models in the Third Quest of the Historical Jesus

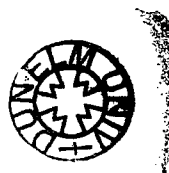
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PhD

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Abstract

Methods and Models in the Third Quest of the Historical Jesus **Márta Cserhádi**

In this thesis I examine some of the major contributions to current historical Jesus research, now commonly known as the third quest of the historical Jesus. As most of the participants in the third quest define their work primarily as historiography, in Chapter 1 I situate these reconstructions in the landscape of present-day historiography, with special attention to the reaction of the authors in question to the challenge of postmodernism.

In view of the methodological diversity of the third quest as well as the lack of consensus about the criteria to be used in the reconstructions or in their evaluation, after a brief survey in Chapter 2 of the history of "criteriology" in life-of-Jesus research, I found it necessary to devise my own list of evaluative criteria in Chapter 3. The general criteria are to do with the overall shape and style of the reconstructions, while the criteria of historical reasoning evaluate them in terms of their presentation as historiography. Finally, a modified version of the "traditional" criteria of the historical-critical method is designed to evaluate the text-related arguments within the reconstructions.

In chapter 4 I analyse some selected contributions from the standpoint of the most hotly debated issue within the third quest, eschatology.

Introduction

"If you suffered from claustrophobia, this wasn't a good place to be. Every seat was filled, and where the chairs stopped there were people sitting, squatting, lying on the floor. Every wall was lined with bodies standing or leaning, and the one open doorway was jammed with a sweaty human mass that extended out into the hallway.

The crowd defied easy categorization. Professional types abounded, among them many prominent New Testament scholars, but the body-piercing contingent was also represented. (Maybe they were professors too.) From a chair that stood out incongruously in the no-man's land between official seating and the speakers' table, Pauline scholar Krister Stendahl took in the proceedings.

What brought them all out on a Sunday night was a panel discussion on "The Meaning of Jesus: What Difference Does Historical Jesus Research Make?" The setting was a Potemkin village in Orlando, Florida, where the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature held their joint annual meeting in November 1998.

Three years earlier, at the AAR/SBL meeting in Philadelphia, a shrewd observer of religious publishing had predicted the imminent demise of "the historical Jesus craze". How wrong can you be?"¹

The report above captures several of the characteristics of historical Jesus research today. First of all, it has become a truly popular phenomenon. Due partly to the publicity campaigns associated with the Jesus Seminar, partly to the business sense of publishers who recognised the marketability of the subject in the



years leading up to the millenium, but first and foremost to the abiding interest in Jesus of many who otherwise feel alienated from traditional Christianity, it has irretrievably escaped the bounds of both the church and the academe.

Growing popular interest is also shown by the large number of television programs (e.g. the 1996 *Lives of Jesus* of the BBC and the 1998 *From Jesus to Christ* in the US) and online publications devoted to the quest. Another sign of the popularity of the subject is the proliferation of introductory volumes and overviews of current research. As Mark Goodacre notes, it was in fact two of the major participants of contemporary life-of-Jesus study who started the trend to produce "digests", condensed and easy-to-read versions of their reconstructions in a format accessible to a wider audience: E.P. Sanders with his *The Historical Figure of Jesus* in 1993 and J. D. Crossan with *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* in 1994², now followed by a joint venture of N. T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg entitled *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (SPCK, London, 1999).

This trend reflects the sea change that has taken place in the latter part of the twentieth century, which can be characterised as the democratisation of learning. At the end of the nineteenth century, Martin Kähler worried that the historical-critical study of the gospel material would result in a highly technicized, elitist approach to Jesus that would exclude the mass of Christians and keep them dependent on the "scribes" possessing this specialised learning.³ Kähler solved the problem by returning to the biblical Christ, the historic person whose influence, the "direct impression of his dynamic essence" can be found in the proclamation of the entire New Testament.⁴ Present-day scholars take the route of presenting their findings in a popular form.

Naturally, this popularisation of scholarship has its negative effects as well. The most obvious one is that sensationalist claims have a much better chance of

reaching a wide audience than reasoned and sober arguments. Some of the headlines presenting the findings of the Jesus Seminar (such as "Most of Jesus' Words Ghostwritten" or "Is the Bible the Gospel Truth?") are a case in point, as are the outlandish claims of Barbara Thiering.⁵ Nevertheless, the gains seem to surpass the loss; as the debate continues, the sensationalism will inevitably abate and serious discussion begin.

Although the quest as a popular phenomenon transcends denominational or institutional boundaries, it has important theological consequences as well. After a long period of scepticism about the possibility of studying the life of Jesus and even denying its theological legitimacy, it has reentered theological discussion with a renewed vigour. John P. Galvin chronicles the way Catholic systematic theologians, after long decades of discussing Jesus strictly in terms of Chalcedonian Christology, have increasingly turned their attention to the Jesus of history.⁶ (An interesting feature of the present quest is the strong Catholic presence within it, especially in contrast to the earlier, exclusively Protestant affairs.) It is perhaps no accident that it is a Catholic scholar, Ben F. Meyer, who contributed the most eloquent theological defence of the historical study of Jesus:

"From Reimarus on, the historians of Jesus have been passionately convinced that they were contending for high stakes. When their question seemed to be dying out, it came to life again. The question persists and there is no doubt about why. It has always pivoted around a fixed centre, a specific conviction with roots so luxuriant, so vital, old and deep that its demise is not to be predicted. It is the conviction of inalienable ties between Christian faith and the Jesus of ancient Palestine. The ties have been debated, narrowed and nuanced, weighed and found wanting, elaborately denied; but the conviction endures, massive, stolid, stubborn,

taking its stand on creeds that have ridden out the ages. From the beginning Christian faith has been a confession of events in human history."⁷

A Third Quest?

The quest of the historical Jesus has its own two-hundred-year history that has been categorised in many different ways. The term "third quest" derives from N. T. Wright, who reserves this label for those recent reconstructions that "follow Schweitzer in placing Jesus within apocalyptic Jewish eschatology"⁸. This group, according to Wright, should be distinguished not only from the preceding two phases of historical Jesus research - the old, nineteenth century liberal quest and the existentialist new quest - but also from the contemporary, neo-Bultmannian "new-new quest" of the Jesus Seminar and its representatives like Burton Mack or J. D. Crossan. This approach concentrates on analysing isolated sayings in the gospel tradition and presents a minimalist non-Jewish picture of Jesus as a wandering wisdom teacher. Similarly, Mark Goodacre identifies the third quest as a "new cross-Atlantic approach, with important agreements on method, perspective and results (an eschatological Jesus within Judaism, reached by paying careful attention to bedrock data)", that is now challenged by the renewed new quest, "a North American affair with an equally distinctive profile (a non-apocalyptic Jesus, not so firmly within Judaism, and a stress of stratifying and analysing wide-ranging source material)".⁹ Leander E. Keck even suggests that in the work of the "new-new quest" we are "witnessing the parousia of the liberal Jesus".¹⁰

While these two trends are indeed identifiable as the two major options within current historical Jesus scholarship, this categorisation may be challenged for several reasons. As Wright himself notes, there are quite a few scholars who do not fit

comfortably in either movements. Vermes, for instance, emphasises Jesus' Jewishness, but at the same time "ends up with an existentialist teacher" while Borg is concerned to place Jesus within a Jewish context but presents him as a non-apocalyptic figure.¹¹ Also, reconstructions classified as belonging to the same group sometimes differ considerably. For example, there is little in common between Sanders' prophet of restoration eschatology and Wright's prophet-Messiah predicting the doom of Jerusalem and thereby the vindication of himself and his followers.

Neither is the mapping of the history of the previous quests or the implication of a clean break between the third quest and what preceded it as straightforward as it appears in Wright's account. Wright equates the *Wredebahn* of thoroughgoing scepticism with the non-eschatological portrait, whereas the latter does not follow from the former. Clive Marsh calls attention to the way Rudolf Bultmann combined a radical scepticism toward the sources with a "profoundly eschatological Jesus".¹² Instead of a monolithic presentation, Marsh also stresses the need for a more nuanced view of the earlier quests and their contemporary incarnations. Crossan, for example, may be said to be the heir of the Romantic Quest that stretches back to Renan and that pays close attention to the presentation of the reconstruction: its rhetoric, its performance.¹³ Furthermore, the Mack-Crossan branch of the quest could be called the postmodern quest, because it "locates itself directly and primarily in the complex multi-faith setting of the contemporary West, with social, economic and political features of Western cultural life never far from view"¹⁴, while the Sanders-Wright line (that Marsh calls the Jewish-Christian quest) is more concerned with a dialogue between contemporary Christians and contemporary Jews.¹⁵ A further criticism Marsh offers of the "customary metanarrative" of the various quests is the labeling of the first half of the twentieth century as the period of "no quest". Not only is this period one in which major works by Bultmann, Dibelius or Klausner

were written, but it is also the Nazi period in which Jesus' Jewishness was denied or sidelined,¹⁶ but the quest was on, for a non-Jewish Jesus.¹⁷

Keeping these objections in mind, I propose to follow J. P. Meier in simply calling the whole of contemporary historical Jesus study the "third quest".¹⁸ In any case, the participants are in continuous dialogue with each other, and keep referring to each other's arguments without respecting any classifications.

Earlier Quests

The beginning of historical Jesus research is traditionally connected to the posthumous publication of Reimarus' *On the Aim of Jesus and his Followers* in 1778. Reimarus' approach was explicitly anti-dogmatic and aimed at showing the difference between the "real" Jesus and the image that the church had conspired to create. Reimarus' theory set the stage for a long tradition of Lives of Jesus in which the aim of scholars, even if they were not hostile to Christianity, was to recover the human Jesus from the shackles of dogmatic Christianity. Paradoxically, the purpose was usually not a return to history, but rather the "peeling away" of history to arrive at the "kernel" of Jesus' teaching which coincided either with enlightened universalist humanism or idealist philosophy. D. F. Strauss in his controversial *Das Leben Jesu* (1835-36) tried to translate the mythical language of the New Testament into Hegelian categories.¹⁹ Adolf von Harnack distilled the "essence of Christianity" from Jesus' teaching as "the fatherhood of God and the infinite value of the human soul". All through the nineteenth century the ideal of liberal theology was to gain direct access to the plain and undogmatic teaching of Jesus, the "serene man of wisdom"²⁰ by using the earliest and "purest" sources. The liberal portraits were felt to have immediate social relevance which was most influentially expressed by A. Ritschl as

"the kingdom of Ends". On the basis of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom, the task was to create a just society which would come about as a result of man's self-activity²¹. The liberal approach is often criticised for modernising Jesus and for mirroring too closely the philosophical and social concerns of their authors. While the simplistic optimism and subjectivity of the liberal school are rightly rejected, their concern for a contemporary relevance of their research is not in itself to blame. As John Riches notes, even their "neo-Kantian" idea of the kingdom where everybody is an end and not a means has its roots in the New Testament.²² What is regrettable is the liberal attempt to detach Jesus from his own social world, accompanied by a "character-assassination of first century Judaism to portray the distinctiveness of Jesus".²³

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the pendulum started to swing back with the appearance of the history-of-religions school, which emphasised the strange and the different in the study of the past, preparing the way for the portrait of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, one whose career should be interpreted in terms of first century ideas and beliefs, particularly in the works of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus Zu Wrede* (1906) is often portrayed as a radical critique of Life of Jesus research. In fact, what Schweitzer criticised was the subjectivity and the modernising tendencies of the nineteenth century liberal *Jesusbild*, but he himself also engaged in a rather imaginative reconstruction of Jesus' ministry, concluding that Jesus was "a stranger to our times". While Schweitzer's reconstruction assumed the basic reliability of Mark's Gospel, William Wrede's *The Messianic Secret in the Gospels* (1901) expressed scepticism about the gospels as pre-dogmatic, historical accounts and claimed that even Mark had organised and reshaped the tradition according to the theological and practical interests of his community. Wrede's "thoroughgoing scepticism" initiated

the move beyond the gospels to the complex traditions behind them. The emphasis on the theological bias of the gospels and the form-critical analysis of the individual pericopes from their narrative context meant that during the larger part of the twentieth century no attempt was made to paint a coherent picture of Jesus' career, much less of his sense of vocation.²⁴

On the side of historical study, it was form-criticism that proved corrosive of liberal views of Jesus²⁵, and in theology it was Martin Kähler's reassertion of the priority of faith in the biblical Christ, as well as the appearance of the Barthian "theology of the word" that rejected any attempt to "know Christ after the flesh". Rudolf Bultmann, drawing on the results of form-criticism but for a primarily theological reason put an end to the quest for several decades - at least in influential German Protestant circles - arguing that the historical Jesus was the source but not the content of the church's proclamation and therefore it was the early church that was the proper subject of historical inquiry.

Ernst Käsemann, in his 1953 lecture, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" inaugurated the so-called "new quest". This movement maintained Bultmann's emphasis on the theological illegitimacy of trying to make the historical Jesus the basis of faith, but at the same time they recognised the need to posit some continuity between Jesus and the kerygma. Käsemann's fundamental recognition was that unless the portrait of Jesus was firmly grounded in history it might be pulled in any direction²⁶ and that a contentless or docetic kerygma may serve different ideologies, even destructive ones like Nazism. The new quest concentrated on establishing a set of criteria with which to build up a core of authentic material. Similarly to the old quest, the emphasis was on the sayings, the teaching of Jesus. The dominant criterion for the quest was dissimilarity which, despite the desire to root the picture of Jesus in history detached him from his social world.

A Paradigm Shift?

From the early eighties there has been a renewed confidence in the possibility of producing overall treatments of Jesus' life. The change of climate is so marked that many scholars speak of a "third quest". There is also a sense of a radical break with the previous quests, a major paradigm shift in life-of-Jesus research. The question is, on the one hand, whether this optimism is justified, and on the other whether the present quest can be regarded quite as different from the preceding ones as it has been presented.

New emphases in the third quest

Whereas the earlier quests were characterised by an overtly theological agenda - either debunking or defending Christianity - reconstructions in the third quest are more historically oriented: their main concern is to place Jesus in his own social world in first century Palestine. Most third questers agree with Barnabas Lindars' dictum that theology cannot dictate, only interpret history.²⁷

It is evident that the shift of emphasis from theological to social and historical questions has in many cases resulted in a more relaxed approach. For example, instead of concentrating on the Christological titles in the New Testament, scholars like Marcus J. Borg try to establish Jesus' religious and social type, inquiring after the categories that must have been relevant to his contemporaries. The disappearance of an overtly theological agenda does not mean, however, that a "fly-on-the-wall" value-free approach is promoted. Most scholars today recognise the impossibility of presuppositionless, "objective" history, although this awareness is

sometimes given the lie by ambitious, in fact positivistic projects like the inventory and method used by J. D. Crossan in his *The Historical Jesus*. In many cases, theological motivation is replaced by an ideological one, and while theological bias is easily spotted in recent works, ideological commitment is rarely brought out into the open. Naturally, while most scholars are quick to point out the bias in someone else's work, few of them seem to have a genuine awareness of their own, apart from "bowing before the shibboleth of personal involvement and nonobjectivity".²⁸

Jesus the Jew

Recent historical Jesus scholarship locates Jesus firmly in his Jewish context. Whereas the overuse of the criterion of dissimilarity in the new quest resulted in a rootless Jesus, third quest portraits using a broader base of background material can give a more credible account of the Jesus movement as one of the various renewal movements of Second Temple Judaism. This emphasis serves as a corrective to the long history of anti-Judaism in Christian theology and the resulting distortions in the reconstructions of e.g. Pharisaic Judaism. Nevertheless, the difficulty of presenting Jesus as a "comprehensible, yet crucifiable first century Jew"²⁹ remains, especially if Jesus is totally assimilated into his Jewish world and the possibility of conflict between him and representatives of other Jewish renewal movements is minimised. The same applies, of course, to representations that place Jesus in a thoroughly Hellenised milieu. A related problem is the pluriformity of Second Temple Judaism itself and the degree to which Palestine and especially Galilee was Hellenised in the first century.

The sociological perspective

Following Gerd Theissen's groundbreaking studies of the sociology of the early Jesus movement the use of various social science models has become a distinctive feature of historical Jesus research. Often, Jesus is presented as a social prophet castigating the ruling elite and setting in motion a social revolution; or at least as a subversive sage criticising the conventional wisdom of the religious and political establishment. Marcus Borg even speaks of the concentration on Jesus' social world as a "consensus focus" in historical Jesus scholarship.³⁰

Although the use of sociology in historical study is doubtlessly indispensable, it is not yet clear how exactly sociological models can be related to historical questions. At times it seems that sociological theories are used to fill in the gaps in the available historical evidence. Crossan, for example, uses Horsley's model of escalating tension and violence in first century Palestine with four stages: injustice, protest and resistance, repression and revolt. As chronologically Jesus' life corresponds with the second stage, Crossan assumes that the period must have been characterised by protest and violence.³¹ The question is whether the social scientific approach is subordinated to historical research or the other way round; in general, what principles govern the use of these methods within an interdisciplinary model.

Holistic approaches

As opposed to the "atomistic" method of the new quest with its concentration on the sayings material, the third quest has produced reconstructions based on the ascertainable facts of Jesus' life. The holistic approach is characterised by a renewed confidence in the possibility of sketching the span of Jesus' career as well as inquiring after his aims and intentions. The question is whether the nature of the material allows the construction of ambitious hypotheses and what the criteria are with which

to verify them. Ben F. Meyer and N. T. Wright emphasise the coherence of the holistic approach as proof of its historical soundness. The possibility, however, of a coherent portrait which is based on the wrong historical assumptions cannot be ruled out.³² The basic difficulty with the verification of these constructs is that negatives are very hard to prove.³³

For some of the third questers there is a clean break with Enlightenment epistemology in the form of a "critical realism"³⁴ defined by N. T. Wright as "a process of knowing that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence realism), while fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the known (hence "critical")".³⁵ It is not quite clear, however, what exactly constitutes an "appropriate dialogue". Are there any criteria by which this appropriateness can be checked or is it merely an intuitive category?

Conclusion

Can we conclude that the third quest is indeed a radical break with the problems and preoccupations of the earlier quests? The answer is difficult for at least two reasons; on the one hand, the studies in question are so diverse in their presuppositions and their methods that while some indeed seem to have strong ties to what went before, others seem to be more original. We should be wary of assuming too complete a break with the past. If, as W. Telford suggests, the new quest basically recast the psychological language of the old quest in existentialist categories³⁶, we might also say that most reconstructions in the third quest, in turn, have recast the existential language of the new quest in socio-political terms. Also, in retrospect it is easy to see how the participants in the previous quests were

influenced by the ideological climate of the age as well as their own sociological location. Can we say, however, that these factors do not affect the results of the present quest? As far as the world of ideas is concerned, Ben F. Meyer remarks that "Reimarus was a Deist, Strauss a Hegelian, Holtzmann a liberal, Bultmann an existentialist.....all of them were children of the Enlightenment....and their enabling hermeneutical resources were also in every case inhibiting and reductionist."³⁷ Have, then, these inhibiting and reductionist hermeneutics been superseded in the third quest as suggested by "critical realists"? If yes, can a new worldview and a new epistemology mean that the questions posed by the Enlightenment are no longer valid and can be disregarded?

A closely related issue is the social location of the participants, which, according to Marcus Borg, "more than anything else, affects how and what we see"³⁸. If this is so, how is the fact that most third quest scholars are located in a Western, Euro-American academic environment and are mostly white, male and middle class reflected in their historical reconstructions, and what does it say about the "implied reader" of these books? Is it possible, as Helmut Koester insists, that life-of-Jesus research has always been tied to a distinctly bourgeois consciousness and is predetermined by a cultural paradigm that is primarily interested in the "perfection of the self" and hopes for a cure of "the political, social and environmental problems of our age....through the ever renewed search for the exemplary personality of Jesus and his wisdom"³⁹?

The difficulties inherent in an attempt to assess research that is very much in progress are obvious, especially when this research is as complex as the quest of the historical Jesus. A certain reduction of the scope of the questioning is inevitable. There are two basic questions I intended to look into in this dissertation. One is the

place of the third quest within contemporary historiography; whether and to what extent it shares the general problems of history writing and whether and in what way it can be placed within the larger trends of historical research. This issue is taken up in the first chapter, together with the closely related question of the ideological or theological presuppositions governing the various reconstructions. The second aspect of the quest I concentrate on is the verifiability of the hypotheses. My main interest lies in discovering the criteria used in the treatments of Jesus' life and even more importantly the criteria that may be employed in the assessment of the contributions. Accordingly, the second chapter is devoted to the criteria of authenticity and their use or non-use in the present quest as well as the previous one. In chapter 3 my own criteria of evaluation are listed. Chapter 4 treats the issue of eschatology separately, as it is perhaps the central question in many of the recent reconstructions.

¹ *The Meaning of Jesus*. Six scholars explain why they study the origins of Christianity - and why it matters. Panel discussion on ChristianityToday.com

² Mark Goodacre; "The Quest to Digest Jesus: Recent Books on the Historical Jesus" in: *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 7 (2000), pp. 156-61.

³ See Barry W. Henaut: "Is the 'Historical Jesus' a Christological Concept?" in: Arnal/Desjardins eds.: *Whose Historical Jesus? Studies in Christianity and Judaism* no. 7., Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Canada, 1997 pp. 244-245. Henaut quotes Kähler's *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* on this point: "In this field, no lay judgment is possible, except perhaps the kind made by inflated dilettantes." (p.62.)

⁴ Henaut p. 245.

⁵ Barbara Thiering: *Jesus the Man. A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls* Doubleday, Sydney, 1992

⁶ John P. Galvin: "From the Humanity of Christ to the Jesus of History: A Paradigm Shift in Catholic Christology" in: *Theological Studies* 55, 1994, pp. 252-273.

⁷ Ben F. Meyer: *The Aims of Jesus* SCM Press, London, 1979, p. 96.

⁸ N. T. Wright: *Jesus and the Victory of God* SPCK, London, 1996 p. 84.

⁹ Mark Goodacre: "Comprehensively Questioning for Jesus?" in: *Reviews in Religion and Theology* Vol.6 Issue2, May 1999 p. 116.

¹⁰ Leander E. Keck: "The Second Coming of the Liberal Jesus?" *The Christian Century*, August 24-31, 1994, pp. 784-787. On religion-online.org

¹¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 83.

¹² Clive Marsh: "Quests of the Historical Jesus in New Historicist perspective" in: *Interpretation* 5.4 1997, p. 410.

¹³ *ibid.* In this respect, Dale C. Allison's suggestion, namely, that we should "abandon periodisation for a typology that would allow us to classify a book, whether from the 1920s or the 1990s, with those akin to it" ought to be given careful consideration. (Dale C. Allison: "The Secularising of the Historical Jesus" online article on pts.edu/SECJESUSpdf., 2000, p. 14.

¹⁴ Perhaps this branch of the third quest is engaged in what Dale C. Allison calls "the secularising of Jesus": "As one would expect in an increasingly secular age, in which transcendent realities are for so many distant or even altogether illusory, there is an increasing number of what may be fairly called secular readings of some Gospel texts." Online article p. 17, see previous note.

¹⁵ *ibid.* 412.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 414.

¹⁷ Dale C. Allison lists no less than 89 academic Jesus-books in the period between 1907 and 1954. Online article pp. 18-20. ¹⁷ See e.g. Meier's "The Present State of the 'Third Quest' of the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain" in: *Biblica* 80, 1999 pp. 459-487.

¹⁹ Marilyn Chapin Massey's excellent analysis of Strauss' work (*Christ Unmasked. The Meaning of The Life of Jesus* in German Politics, Chapel Hill and London, The University of North Carolina Press, 1983) also sheds light on the role of this book as one of the most important contributions to the democratisation of German society and politics in the first half of the 19th century and the consequent repression by the authoritarian regime. This approach raises the question of the relationship of life-of-Jesus research with the broader currents of social and political change.

²⁰ Ben F. Meyer: *The Aims of Jesus*, London, SCM Press, 1979, p. 16.

²⁰ John K. Riches: *A Century of New Testament Study* Cambridge, The Lutterworth Press, 1993 p. 15.

²² *ibid.* p. 18

²² *ibid.* p. 19

²⁴ Although, as Dale C. Allison notes, the fact that in the first half of the twentieth century scholars gave up writing biographies of Jesus, does not mean that they abandoned the task of writing about Jesus' life and teaching. Thus, the period of "no quest" should rather be called the period of "no biography". (online article pp. 3-4.)

²⁵ Riches, *A Century....* p. 52.

²⁶ N. T. Wright: *Jesus and the Victory of God* London, SPCK 1996, p.23.

²⁷ quoted in William Telford: "Major Trends and Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus" in: B. Chilton/C. A. Evans ed.: *Studying the Historical Jesus* Leiden, Brill 1994, p. 63.

²⁸ R. Scroggs: a review of Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* in *Interpretation* 1992, p. 301.

²⁹ Wright: *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 86.

³⁰ Marcus J. Borg: *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* Valley Forge, Pa, Trinity Press International 1994, p. 10.

³⁰ J. D. Crossan: *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991, pp. 124-136.

³² Telford, p. 59.

³³ E. P. Sanders/ Margaret Davies: *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* London, SCM Press, 1989. P. 310.

³⁴ An epistemological attitude formulated by Bernard Lonergan and introduced into New Testament studies by Ben F. Meyer.

³⁴ N. T. Wright: *The New Testament and the People of God* London, SPCK 1992, p. 35.

³⁶ Telford, p. 60.

³⁷ Meyer: "The Aims..." p. 27.

³⁸ Borg: *Jesus in...* p. 99.

³⁸ Helmut Koester: "The Historical Jesus and the Historical Situation of the Quest: An Epilogue" in: Chilton/Evans: *Studying..* p. 544.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY, IDEOLOGY, THEOLOGY

1.1. Introduction

Practitioners and reviewers of current historical Jesus scholarship agree in characterising it as a new phase of research in which theological *a priori* are replaced by purely historical considerations. In this respect the third quest is contrasted especially with the second one, whose alleged main preoccupation was a demonstration of the continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ - a *par excellence* theological endeavour. In E. P. Sanders' view, Käsemann's main concern was the question whether historical assertions *ought* to be made about Jesus; his brief sketch about the relationship between Jesus and Judaism was provided only in the context of a theological essay concerned with the proper position about the historical Jesus. By contrast, Sanders' stated aim is to write a book about Jesus without this theological question in mind.¹ Other contributors in the third quest echo Sanders' sentiments. J. P. Meier denounces the first two quests as "theological projects masquerading as historical projects".² He argues that with the maturing of the historical critical method it has become possible to engage in a "purely empirical, historical quest for Jesus that prescind[s] from, or brackets what is known by faith", making "strictly historical claims, verifiable by any disinterested practitioner of the academic discipline of history".³ (Not only do most reconstructions lack an explicit theological agenda, there is also no obvious alliance between historical research and one or more philosophical schools, as in the case of the first quest and Hegelian philosophy or the second quest and existentialism.) Marcus Borg attributes this change in the question-framing of historical Jesus

research partly to the different academic setting this kind of work takes place in. The majority of biblical scholars now work in public universities or secularised private colleges where instead of an explicitly Christian agenda students bring more 'global' concerns to the texts.⁴

In view of this self-understanding of the third quest as a purely or predominantly historical enterprise, it seems necessary to attempt to situate it within the larger context of the current trends and problems of historiography.⁵ This attempt needs to take account of the specific perspectives and models these reconstructions represent; must inquire after the possible metanarratives that may determine them; and has to ask the question whether and to what extent the contributors are aware of the crisis of history-writing itself occasioned by the 'linguistic turn' of postmodernism. In the course of this investigation the problem of the intricate relationship between history and ideology will inevitably play a significant role: just as historical scholars can no longer be (blissfully?) unaware of the socially and personally conditioned nature of every aspect of their work, so also the reviewer of their reconstructions cannot fail to note the same. The dangers inherent in such an approach are obvious: the reviewer is easily tempted to assume a 'God's-eye view' from which to survey and judge these 'flawed' enterprises; also, given the sensitive issues of meaning and value involved, the other temptation is to resort to *ad hominem* arguments designed to 'reveal' the bad faith and personal prejudice of certain contributors. The only way to avoid these dangers is to concentrate on the ideas and sentiments actually expressed by the authors and to apply the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' to their implied or hidden 'metanarrative' only when there are serious reasons to do so.

After a brief survey of the major trends and problems of history-writing, in this chapter I will try to situate the five authors I have selected from the participants

of the third quest (E. P. Sanders, J. P. Meier, M. J. Borg, J. D. Crossan and N. T. Wright) in this landscape with respect to their epistemology, the specific aspects of history they find significant and the meaning they attribute to their work or the ideological or theological stance that can be discerned behind it.

1.2. The Crisis of History

1.2.1. The Modernist Paradigms

Historiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries consciously modelled itself after the natural sciences that were considered to be strictly objective and value-free, based on the experimental method and the causal laws of the Newtonian universe. Knowledge of nature, and by analogy historical knowledge was based on the correspondence theory of truth: things were thought to be known "in ways that correspond with their actual objective existence"⁶. The main aim of historians was to search for the universal laws of historical development that would be compatible with the universality of Newtonian laws. Whereas earlier (medieval) histories were meant to show the "hand of God at work among saints and rulers", in this period new techniques were designed to enable scholars to "distinguish fact from legend by the rigorous examination of documents"⁷. Also, the centrality of the Christian concept of salvation history as governing secular history was replaced by the idea of progress, whereby the modern period became "the standard by which the past was judged"⁸. Due to the pervasive influence of Hegelian philosophy, the importance of history itself increased enormously, since according to Hegel, philosophical truth itself was revealed in history.⁹ This classical historicism that evolved into a "total philosophy of life" in which "history replaced philosophy as the science that provided insights into the meaning of the human world"¹⁰, contributed

decisively to the development of history as a professional discipline. The Rankean model of history-writing emphasised the rigorous application of scientific criteria, the importance of the primary documentary sources (*ad Fontes*) and the disinterested, neutral stance of the historian reconstructing the past as it actually happened. An omniscient narrator in plain, neutral style related the historical facts found through the interrogation of documents.

Importantly (and ironically) this professionalisation of the discipline also meant an "increasing ideologisation of historical writing": Ranke and his followers found in the archives evidence that revealed "the ethical character" of the established social and political institutions of contemporary Germany. In this way the scientific ethos of the profession stood in tension with its political function of legitimating the established order. This German model that also involved a "retreat from a broader cultural history to one more narrowly focused on politics"¹¹ and a concentration on individuals rather than collective phenomena attained such intellectual prestige that it was later followed in other countries as well. This 'scientific' model of historiography focused its attention on the refining of the classical philological methods used in studying the archival sources, but paid no attention to theoretical considerations. The assumption was that "a historical account contains its own explanation", and the historian's only task was to immerse himself in the subject matter of his study.¹²

With the shift of interest from political to social history it became obvious that this a-theoretical or anti-theoretical stance was inadequate to explain larger structural changes within societies. In place of the narrative history of the German historicist model that sought to understand the intentions and actions of individuals, the social histories of Marx, Weber and the French *Annales* school - in their different ways - concentrated on broad economic and demographic trends, and prepared the

way for twentieth century social historians' attempts to "uncover the lives of ordinary people in all their richness".¹³ These histories of ordinary life were later enriched by the contributions of cultural anthropologists who gave social historians "a theoretical model for discussing how societies integrate values into their workaday way of life".¹⁴ Social historians also uncovered the suffering caused by the marginalisation of whole groups of people within industrialised societies that questioned the grand narrative of Western progress and modernisation, and thereby they functioned at times as social critics, not merely disinterested observers.

To summarise: the major Modernist paradigms of historiography may be characterised as the non-theoretical, document-, event- and person-oriented political histories on the one hand, and the theoretically conscious social histories concerned with social context and social change on the other. Alun Munslow closely relates this dichotomy to another distinction, between Reconstructionist and Constructionist history.¹⁵ For Munslow, Reconstructionists are the naïve positivists who hold that truthful meaning can be directly inferred from the primary sources, using empirical methods in a disciplined craftsmanlike manner. Constructionists share the Reconstructionist belief in the existence of objective historical facts derivable from studying the evidence, but instead of a narrative single-event history they explain the evidence by placing it into a pre-existing explanatory framework called *covering laws*. These laws are regarded as general rules or patterns of human action.

Alternatively, these two options within the Modernist historical experiment may be classified as lower case history and upper case history¹⁶, respectively. This distinction emphasises the tendency of the Constructionist type of historical writing to become strongly ideological. Upper case histories view history as possessing an immanent direction in which the objective significance of contingent events is

provided by their "place and function within a general schema of historical development usually construed as appropriately progressive".¹⁷ An obvious example is, of course, Marxist historiography, which, though by no means the only such attempt, demonstrates convincingly how the understanding of historical events is governed by an underlying metanarrative of human progress through class conflict and the development of the modes of production.

1.2.2. The Postmodern Challenge

The second half of the twentieth century has seen the steady erosion of belief in the "heroic model" of value-neutral science and technology and with it the grand narrative of economic and social progress. On the one hand, historians of science discovered that the work of the great icons of the scientific revolution was heavily influenced by the political, social and religious world in which they lived.¹⁸ On the other, social historians, by uncovering the experiences of marginalised and oppressed groups, undermined the grand narratives of national histories, thereby questioning the function of history as the supplier of a self-congratulatory national image.¹⁹ These developments resulted in a serious questioning of the nature and role of scientific rationality in both the natural and the human sciences, and posed the problem of the relationship between knowledge and power more sharply than ever before.²⁰ Michel Foucault 'problematised'²¹ even the most cherished assumption of Western society, the concept of the autonomous, independent individual, arguing that the modern self was the product of "the disciplines and discourses of institutions".²² The recognition of the intensely ideological nature of history writing led some of the radically sceptical postmodern theorists to deny the very referentiality of historiography. The 'linguistic turn' of postmodern theory has meant a radical questioning of the relationship between the signified, the objectively

existing, actual past, and the signifier, the language by which historians construe their explanations of the 'facts'.²³ Perhaps the most influential postmodern historical theorist, Hayden White, argues that the historical narrative is not a neutral 'container' of historical fact, rather, it consists of poetic and rhetorical elements by which "what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story".²⁴ For White, historical interpretation is not merely a commentary on 'the facts'. The emplotment of historical narrative transforms the facts into a story that is presented as inherent in the facts, when in fact it is imposed upon them.

Naturally, the first casualties of the attack on history were 'upper case' histories, whose ideological conditioning was immediately apparent.²⁵ Upper case histories are governed by metanarratives, "sweeping stories about American and Western problems,....as well as remedies for the future"²⁶; therefore the postmodernist charge that they are but cultural myths, fiction in the guise of history, appears to carry more weight.²⁷ If the postmodern critique of history stopped at 'problematizing' upper case history, lower case or academic historians could not agree more. They "modestly eschew meta-narrative claims" anyway, having "drunk in with their milk the fact-value problematic", and consider upper case histories "the stuff of political correctness".²⁸

The postmodern critique of history, however, has proved to be corrosive not only of upper case, but also lower case, 'academic' or 'proper' history, questioning "the *doxa* which states that the 'proper' study of the past is a study 'for its own sake'".²⁹ Postmodernists draw attention to the inadequacies of the empirical method. The "ontological actuality" of the past, they argue, does not entail any specific epistemology or method. Not only is historical evidence itself incomplete, also, the empirical method cannot account for the *significance* given to "the selection, distribution and weighting of 'the facts' in finished narratives". Facts do not

impose significance on themselves; for that, "an external theory of significance is always needed".³⁰ Another shortcoming of lower case history is what Dominic LaCapra calls the "technicist fallacy": the idea that all the "complicated epistemological, methodological, ideological, problematical positionings of historical representation could be solved "technically"". But since the sources themselves are texts, that is, they themselves attributed significance to their facts by selection and interpretation, and thereby constructed *their* version of the past, they require a "critical reading that goes beyond traditional 'Quellenkritik'".³¹

Not even the apparent flexibility and openness of academic history escapes the criticism of postmodernists. By means of admitting unsynthesizable interpretations, lower case history "gains credit for its liberal pluralism, for its guarantee of academic freedom as opposed to the closures of upper case ideology", Keith Jenkins argues. This tolerance, however, only extends to those histories that subscribe to the values of academic history, so that in rejecting upper case histories "a tolerant liberal pluralism in the lower case becomes an intolerant Liberal Ideology in the upper."³²

The ideology behind academic history is identified by postmodernism as the ideology of the more conservative elements of the bourgeoisie who do not need a trajectory into a different future in the upper case mode. The fact that this group has "now arrived at its preferred historical destination - liberal, bourgeois, market capitalism"³³ - means that it does not any longer need a "past-based future-orientated fabrication".³⁴ Because the present is everything, the past can now be neutralised and studied "for its own sake".³⁵ This means that the structure of the interpretations presented by academic historians only *appears* to coincide with the structure of factuality (it does not tell the truth; it has a 'truth effect'). It needs the

legitimizing authority of factuality, but in fact it is no different from upper case histories in that it *constructs* an interpretation of 'the past'.

By demystifying the processes of historical writing, radical postmodern theories purport to delegitimise history as an intellectual enterprise by unmasking historical discourse as no more than a power-game. It is no accident that the only form of historiography that is compatible with postmodern thinking is New Historicism.³⁶ New Historicism views texts as "part of complex symbolic negotiations that reflect *power relations* (italics mine)"³⁷. Primarily, then, New Historicism functions as ideological critique that concentrates on five exemplary "moments" that find expression in texts: anecdote, outrage, resistance, containment and autobiography.³⁸

In many ways, New Historicism seems to me to be the inverse of the old (classical) historicism of nineteenth century German idealism. Both agree in finding the ultimate explanation of things within history, but while classical historicism views history as the site of the realisation of the highest ethical and rational principles, New Historicism is interested in "contingency, chance and happenstance" and "unsavoury" socio-cultural practices.³⁹ The basic preoccupation of New Historicism is the relationship of power, especially imperial power, and resistance, and the ways in which power desires and eventually manages to contain its resisters. "Resisters are tragically bounded by the dominant ideology."⁴⁰ The characteristic strategy of New Historicist analyses is "to combine seemingly disparate materials so as to create meticulously staged "coincidences", "impossible" linkages, startling juxtapositions and other contingent connections that bypass the causal models of explanation that undergird traditional historical narratives."⁴¹ Another typical feature of New Historical writing is the opening anecdote⁴² which (usually by exemplifying the random, casual

violence of power) undermines the 'normal', identity-strengthening historical narrative of a given establishment.

Since postmodern theories problematise those concepts, institutions and cultural standards that have always been taken for granted as natural givens by describing them as ideological constructs, it is no wonder that the issues that were originally debated within the confines of the academe have become weapons in a culture war. This culture war, especially in the United States, centres upon historical writing as the most potent means of identity building on the national level. Traditionalist defenders of the older unified view of the national past as the rousing story of freedom and progress react strongly against the introduction into history of new subject matters such as race, gender, ethnicity and class, issues that point to the conflict of values and interests that divide the nation and criticise the status quo. For this reason the criticism of academic writing does not only react against the radical cultural relativism of postmodern theorising but also against other forms of radicalism that have not given up at least some of the older modernist convictions.

1.2.3. History Fights Back

Understandably, a strong reaction against the postmodern attack on the fundamentals of historiography "as we know it" has set in among historians.

Traditionalists and moderates on the left as well as on the right have striven to rebuild at least some of the certainties that have been attacked by postmodernists. Gertrude Himmelfarb, a conservative historian accuses postmodern historians of recognising "no reality principle, only the pleasure principle - history at the pleasure of the historian."⁴³ She sees postmodernism as an ally of other subversive trends, notably feminist history, since both make of history "an instrument in the struggle for power".⁴⁴ Her critique, above all, concerns

postmodernism's flight from the hard discipline of historical reasoning: "bad habits drive out good, easy methods drive out hard ones".⁴⁵ Finally, she condemns postmodernism as being anti-humanistic because it wants to free people from the burden of history which is in fact the guarantee of their humanity. "Liberationist history, like liberationist theology, is not a new and higher form of the discipline; it is the negation of the discipline."⁴⁶

Christopher Norris, a left-wing historian, also sees in postmodernist literary theory a danger of reducing different disciplines to the level of generalised "intertextuality", thus "evading the forms of self-criticism that those disciplines have evolved in the process of examining their own distinctive truth-claims".⁴⁷ His protest, most of all, is aimed at the inability or refusal of critical theory to distinguish between "reason and rhetoric, knowledge and power, judgements arrived at through a process of uncoerced, rational debate, and judgements resting on prejudice, dogma or the exercise of unchecked authority."⁴⁸ Norris is but one representative of a group of historians who accept the validity of the turn against naïve positivism as well as the need for a new awareness of the extent to which history is constructed. They refuse, however, to give in to the thoroughgoing relativism of postmodernists. The most profound reason for this rejection is the realisation, that "if there is no truth, there is no injustice....The victims and protestors of any putative injustice are deprived of their last and often best weapon, that of telling what really happened. They can only tell their story, which is something else. Morally and politically, therefore, anything goes."⁴⁹

What both these scholars are unwilling to give up in the face of the postmodern threat is an adherence to a special logic of historical thought, to the rules of the craft of historiography that have evolved during the last two centuries

within the discipline, even if these rules are rules of thumb rather than the strict principles of formal logic or scientific inquiry.

Following D. H. Fisher's excellent book on the fallacies of historians,⁵⁰ some of the most important aspects of the logic of historical thinking could be summarised as follows:

1. History is not primarily storytelling. It is a *problem-solving discipline* that asks an "open-ended question about past events and answers it with selected facts which are arranged in the form of an explanatory paradigm."⁵¹ (A good open-ended question is one which allows a real choice but limits the range of the kinds of facts that can answer it.) A proper historical question must also be *operational*: it must be resolvable in empirical terms.⁵² (Consequently, *why* questions are counterproductive in history, as opposed to *what, when, where* and *how* questions.)

2. Historians should beware of proceeding by means of *counterquestions* and operating by an adversary method. "A fight between wild-eyed exponents of X and Y will help not at all if Z was in fact the case, as it usually is."⁵³

3. The meaning of an empirical statement depends upon the context from which it is taken.⁵⁴

4. The burden of proof always rests upon the author.⁵⁵

5. Valid empirical proof requires not merely the establishment of possibility, but an estimate of probability.⁵⁶

6. The criteria of factual significance must be made explicit: the only alternative is covert commitments. These criteria are substantive rather than methodological: our method does not select the significant facts; "a fact becomes significant in proportion to its relevance to an explanation model".⁵⁷

7. Historians should beware of *anachronism*: the description of an event as if it occurred at some point in time other than when it actually happened.

8. Historians should beware of *presentism*: when the antecedent in a narrative is falsified by being defined or interpreted in terms of the consequent: The presentist method "in the name of modernity and relevance, sacrifices precisely that knowledge which historians can most usefully provide".⁵⁸

9. Historians should beware of the fallacy of *tunnel history*: "when a complex problem of development is taken apart and its components are extruded into long thin ribbons of change".⁵⁹

10. Probably the most difficult bias to eradicate is the fallacy of presuming *consensus and continuity* or *conflict and change* in a historical situation.⁶⁰

11. The genetic fallacy converts a temporal sequence into an ethical system as in German historicism that assumed that whatever was becoming was right. Such ethical historicism is circular, since "an ethical system is bootlegged into history, and then proclaimed to the world as the lesson of history itself".⁶¹

12. The fallacy of *reductionism*, confusing necessary with sufficient cause is typical in ideological, upper case history, while its opposite, the fallacy of *indiscriminate pluralism* is "the occupational hazard of academic historians".⁶² It is also a form of reductionism when a scholar finds *the* motivational key to the behaviour of a historical person.⁶³

13. It is extremely important to distinguish between sound analogies and unsound ones.⁶⁴

14. Historians should beware of using arguments *ad hominem* that serve to shift attention from the argument to the arguer.

These rules, of course, are incapable of distinguishing "a shallow argument from a profound truth"⁶⁵, but they can serve as some kind of check on the arguments used in historical interpretations. Are these procedures, however, capable

of dealing with the most fundamental questions posed by the postmodern critique of history?

The problem of authorial bias is not among these, since self-critical historians have always been aware of its presence, even if they are reluctant to regard it as all pervasive as postmodern theories. Still, they insist on distinguishing between the way knowledge is acquired and the *validity* of that knowledge. "The fact that historical knowledge is itself historically caused by the situation of the historian does not in any degree imply that it is false. Blind patriotism may cause a Polish historian to assert that a German army invaded Poland in 1939. That statement possesses a truth-value that is independent of its origins. A German historian might be similarly motivated to insist that a Polish army invaded Germany in 1939. That statement, whatever its cause, is false. The same logic equally applies to factual statements of every magnitude, though its application becomes more complex in a geometric ratio to the increase in size."⁶⁶

There still remain, however, at least three serious problems that cannot be solved by recourse to the formal criteria of historical writing.

One of them involves the jump from the level of gathering and listing historical facts to the level of interpretation. In Lyotard's terms, "you cannot extrapolate from one category of "phrase regime" to another (say, from the category of cognitive reason which may help one find the facts, to speculative reason whereby, from the findings of cognitive reason one can legitimately infer that such facts are leading to the inevitable victory of the proletariat, or progress, or whatever), as though the latter were absolutely entailed by the former."⁶⁷ This problem seems to concern only upper case histories, but in fact it affects lower case ones as well, since they also need to take this step from the collection of data to

advancing hypotheses, so a fictional element is involved in their reconstructions as well.

The other problem is to do with the nature of the sources. They themselves contain historical data that have already been selected and interpreted by their original author(s) or compiler(s), and they themselves are narrative constructs. This means that no sharp distinction can be made between original and derivative authorities: "The longing for the innocent, unprocessed source that will afford a fresher, truer vision (that is, the romantic vision) is doomed to frustration."⁶⁸

Finally, the empiricist method used by academic historians cannot account for the *significance* of historical facts. The criteria of significance are always derived from the overall interpretation and are not dictated by the sources themselves.

Despite these serious difficulties historians argue that historical scholarship must not abdicate its epistemological responsibility. Within history, "the distinction between truth and falsehood remains fundamental",⁶⁹ even if a straightforward correspondence theory of truth is no longer adequate. For Rankean hermeneutics, it was possible to "get the story straight"; to reconstruct the clear meaning of a historical text through a thorough philological analysis⁷⁰. Today, since meaning is no longer regarded to be transparent, historians should "get the story crooked", that is, as Hayden White asserts in *Metahistory*, that "it is the tension between modes of explanation, emplotment, ideology and structure that do not "naturally" align themselves that causes a work to retain that special power found in the classics of historiography, as opposed to the shorter-lived consistencies of the doctrinaires".⁷¹ This observation could even be transformed into a kind of negative criterion concerning historical representations: in view of the incompleteness and "processed" nature of historical data as well as the difficulties involved in placing them within a

coherent historical narrative, representations that achieve a too perfect "fit" between the data and the hypothesis are suspect.

If objectivity in the "old" sense cannot be attained, then historians should strive for *plausibility*, one that rests "not on the arbitrary invention of a historical account but involves rational strategies in determining what is in fact plausible....To be sure every historical account is a construct, but a construct arising from a dialog between the historian and the past, one that does not occur in a vacuum, but within a community of inquiring minds who share criteria of plausibility."⁷² This community should not be viewed, however, as the commonwealth of disinterested, professional observers. As we have seen, such an elitist concept of a "scientific community" doing value-free research is illusory at best. Instead, the ideological interests of the participants should be foregrounded⁷³ as much as possible. (By foregrounding I do not mean a mechanical "confession" along the lines of "I am white, female, Protestant etc." but a clear statement of the meaning and significance the particular historical problem has for the researcher either personally or as part of an "interpretive community".) By recognising and admitting their own situatedness, historians can "use their own self-understanding to probe the past with imagination".⁷⁴

With the loss of the universal validity of several of the old metanarratives, there is a danger for groups that define their identity by means of different metanarratives to defend their self-image by cutting themselves off from dialogue with other groups. These groups might even employ their own coterie of historians who are to provide the historical justification for their identity as a nation, religion, ethnic group, class or gender.⁷⁵ Therefore it is extremely important for such groups and historians representing them to remain open to dialogue with others. Through the ages, history has always served two conflicting and equally fundamental human

needs: "the psychological need for comprehending experience which calls for accuracy, as well as the human drive for personal recognition that encourages myth making."⁷⁶ It is easy to see, however, that if different groups create their own histories without reference to rival claims to historical truth, then myth making will inevitably stifle the voices of accuracy. For this reason, the most potent defence against the reduction of historical truth to group interests is open debate in a democratic society where equal access to the evidence is not blocked by those in power. "If knowledge and the discourses it generates offer power, then the issue of access to it becomes vitally important."⁷⁷ Historical knowledge, although socially constructed as an expression of the self-understanding of a particular people or group, should be accessible to and usable by people belonging to other groups. Therefore, scholars should be "seekers of a workable truth communicable within an improvable society".⁷⁸ Historians do their communities a disservice when they give up their quest for truth for fear of damaging certain cherished illusions. The other extreme, however, is equally dangerous; when in the name of objectivity and disinterestedness and forgetting their own situatedness historians seek to destroy important positive elements of group identity by means of an all-pervasive 'hermeneutic of suspicion' and historical relativism.

1.3. Historical Jesus Research as Historiography

I think it is fair to say that the problems that characterise contemporary historical writing apply *a fortiori* to studies of the historical Jesus. Due to his significance for the church in particular and Western civilisation in general, the figure of Jesus has been the focus of heated controversy from the beginnings of biblical historical criticism, with all parties endeavouring to have Jesus on their side, to have

him endorse their theology and/or social program. (In the words of a typical Crossan quip, "....strange things happen to historians when the subject is Jesus....if historical reconstruction is a minefield, historical *Jesus* reconstruction is all mine, no field."⁷⁹) This, of course, makes claims to disinterestedness and objectivity even more problematic than in other areas of history writing. In addition, there is a growing awareness of the complexities of the gospel traditions and of the fact that possible data about the historical Jesus are embedded within distinctive narrative constructs created by the evangelists. In general, the aim of historical Jesus research has been to isolate historically reliable material from its original literary context and use these 'authentic' pieces of information as windows to Jesus and his world. The postmodern critique of historiography, however, has problematised just this "text-as-window" approach, pointing out that discrete textual pieces only acquire their meaning *in context*. If this context differs from their originating context, then it is provided by the historian (or rather, the metanarrative of the historian or her implied audience). In this way historical reconstructions are bound to appear as rival statements about Jesus to the gospel portraits.

Accordingly, some of the recent calls to abandon the quest have focused on the danger of severing the connection between some gospel material and its original context. Luke T. Johnson, for example, argues that the historically ascertainable facts about Jesus should not and cannot be interpreted apart from the general *pattern* found in the various writings of the New Testament.⁸⁰ Robert Crotty, in *The Jesus Question*, argues that since the gospels are ahistorical, and were never meant to be historical, historical interpretation should not be privileged over against other forms of literary discourse. The historical study of Jesus has only a negative value, namely, showing that "Christian faith cannot be constructed on history".⁸¹ "...[B]ut

Christians, with their Enlightenment mentality, are bent on historicising the myth, thereby asking the wrong questions and rewarding the wrong answers."⁸²

Despite renewed warnings about the difficulties or even impossibility of studying Jesus historically, third questers are not prepared to give in to a wholesale relativisation of historical truth. Most of them would agree - with the possible exception of J. P. Meier - that it is *their reconstruction* that provides a new context for what they consider as authentically reliable material. They would argue, however, that this new context is not entirely constructed on subjective grounds but is guided by certain constraints imposed on it by what can be known of the actual historical setting of first century Palestine. To use Rudolf Bultmann's distinction, all historians of Jesus have a "life-relation" to their subject that involves them in a "pre-understanding" (*Vorverständnis*). Their picture of the past, however, is false "only when the historian takes his own pre-understanding for a final understanding".⁸³ Paradoxically, the recognition of the constructedness of historical interpretation can even help historians appreciate the remoteness and difference of the past from the present as an aid in a better understanding of both the present and the past. The remoteness of a historical tradition reveals that the people who constructed it saw their historical reality differently from the way we see ours. If the milieu we find in historical texts were familiar to us, "we would seem to live in a natural world with unchanging basic structures which are necessary as they are. Only the remoteness of the historical makes us aware that historical milieus are just as meaningful human constructions as our modern world."⁸⁴

Nevertheless, there are sharp differences among third quest practitioners as to which elements should be seen as more important in Jesus' historical matrix as well as which historical (or social or anthropological) models should be used for interpreting the data. Some of these scholars still work clearly within the modernist

paradigm, while others engage more fully with the postmodern challenge. What is common to most recent reconstructions, however, is that they emphasize their discontinuity with the older, theologically motivated metanarratives of New Testament scholarship (such as the desire to find continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ within the second quest). The new metanarratives of historical Jesus research are more varied and reflect the fragmentation of historical as well as theological studies in the postmodern period.

1.3.1. The "Lower Case Historians"

1.3.1.1. E. P. Sanders

In the concluding chapter of *Jesus and Judaism* E. P. Sanders distances himself emphatically from reconstructions that proceed on the basis of theological *a priori* and states his own aims strictly in terms of the standard methods of historical research. He is harshly critical of scholars who "write books about Jesus in which they discover that he agrees with their own version of Christianity".⁸⁵ This approach, for Sanders, is damaging not only to history, but to theology as well. "It is...bad history. Though I am no theologian I suspect that it is bad theology."⁸⁶ (This comment suggests that Sanders' dissatisfaction with these previous reconstructions is twofold: he disagrees with their theological content and as a lower case historian he rejects them as upper case histories.) The solution he proposes is to "free history and exegesis from the control of theology; that is, from being obligated to come to certain conclusions, which are pre-determined by theological commitments".⁸⁷

Since Sanders rejects the traditional theological metanarratives about the historical Jesus, the question is what his own metanarrative is and where it originates. He denies any connection between his portrait of Jesus and his own

theological heritage." I am a liberal, modern, secularised Protestant, brought up in a church dominated by low Christology and the social gospel. I am proud of the things that religious tradition stands for. I am not bold enough, however, to suppose that Jesus came to establish it or that he died for the sake of its principles."⁸⁸ This attitude suggests that Sanders intends to study the history of Jesus for its own sake, prescinding from questions of theological significance or contemporary relevance. He believes that by establishing the most secure historical facts about Jesus using the methods of professional historiography he can ascertain "what we can know"⁸⁹. These secure facts will then enable him to make inferences on their basis, and establish causal relations among the events of Jesus' career. Once the fundamental elements of his portrayal are established, "they point *inescapably* (italics in the original) to the description of Jesus as connected with hope for the restoration of Israel. *This general depiction is not imposed on the texts, but arises naturally from them.*" (italics mine)⁹⁰ In other words, in Sanders' view, it is the facts themselves that configure in the way presented in his reconstruction. The only aspect that may be challenged by others is the *meaning* attributed to this configuration.

Under this (self) description, Sanders does not seem to have a metanarrative at all, apart from the disinterested study of history. No ideological position is expressed; on the contrary, a possible connection to Sanders' religious heritage is expressly disavowed. The only indication of a possible metanarrative is the passion and animus with which Sanders attacks what he regards as serious distortions of Judaism in previous theological constructions, especially ones which contrast Jesus' belief in the grace of God to the merit-seeking legalism of 'mainstream Judaism': "...first Christianity is defined as consisting of a set of religious abstractions...; then those abstractions are denied to its parent; then this supposed theological disagreement is retrojected into the life of Jesus and made the

pivot on which the story turns".⁹¹ Once the metanarrative of correcting Christian misperceptions of Judaism and in general fighting Christian anti-Judaism is identified, it becomes less possible to see the fundamental elements of Sanders' portrayal as arising "naturally" from the facts themselves. If, for example, Sanders' treatment of Jesus' relationship to sinners is such a fundamental element, the influence of his metanarrative is obvious at this point. His correct observation, that Jewish leaders were unlikely to have rejected repentant sinners, is followed by the suggestion that Jesus' offence was that he accepted into his own community the "wicked" without requiring previous repentance from them through the approved channels. This, followed by the assertion that "there was no substantial conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees with regard to Sabbath, food and purity laws"⁹², as J. D. Crossan rightly remarks, is "almost like praising a serial killer for paying his traffic fines." Sanders "replaces the claim that *Judaism had no acceptance for repentant sinners* with the idea that *Jesus had acceptance for unrepentant sinners*".⁹³ Here Sanders' desire to correct a rightly perceived injustice dictates the reconstruction rather than allowing the 'facts' to interpret themselves. (Which they never do.)

Sanders sees the historical setting of first century Palestine clearly within a consensus/continuity rather than a conflict/change model. The economic problems of the day do not play an important part in his reconstruction,⁹⁴ whereas politics only appears in terms of discussing whether Jesus had any military or political ambitions. Sanders concludes that since there is absolutely no evidence for any such ambition, Jesus must have been apolitical. Political figures like Pilate, Antipas or the high priests appear exclusively as individuals, whose good and bad points Sanders discusses without reference to the institutions they represent. In J. D. Crossan's words, Sanders fails to distinguish "between individual or personal evil and systemic and structural evil".⁹⁵

Instead of a broader setting of social and political history, Sanders places Jesus within the context of Judaism primarily as a religious system. As Richard Horsley and J. D. Crossan point out, the separation of religion from the political and social sphere within first century Judaism is anachronistic and reflects the social location of the church in the modern world rather than the situation in ancient Palestine. "There is nothing as un-Jewish as a separation of land from covenant, economics from religion, and ritual from justice."⁹⁶ The primary context of Jesus for Sanders is the setting of theological concepts such as "history of salvation" and "eschatology".⁹⁷ He justifies choosing these mental constructs as the immediate context for Jesus by claiming that the primary sources, the synoptic gospels share this fundamental outlook. In other words, the choice of this theological context conforms to the nature of the sources as well as to the way Jesus himself saw the world as a "theological idealist".⁹⁸ Because Jesus expected God to act decisively in the near future, Sanders regards him unlikely to have been a social reformer urging his followers to "build an alternative society that will be the kingdom of God."⁹⁹

1.3.1.2. J. P. Meier

Among the participants of the third quest it is Meier who stands most explicitly and consciously within the tradition of nineteenth century historical criticism in the lower case mode. He evidently sees this form of historiography as the only valid one, because it conforms to the rigorous standards of value-free, objective science. Meier contrasts academic history especially with various forms of upper case, ideological history writing. We have seen how he denounces the first two quests for being "theological projects masquerading as historical projects".¹⁰⁰ The same criticism is directed at the contemporary versions of ideology-driven reconstructions, such as the Jesus Seminar's non-eschatological portrait that projects

a "modern American agenda onto a first century Palestinian Jew".¹⁰¹ Meier is keen to keep history and theology in separate compartments to "recognise and honor the proper academic distinctions" and ensure that the historical Jesus does not become "a stalking horse for a particular philosophy of language, a particular brand of liberation or feminist theology or indeed one particular school of late twentieth-century Catholic theology or practice" just as it became "a stalking horse of nineteenth century liberal Protestant theology in Germany".¹⁰² This separation is necessary for the historical reconstruction to be able to truly serve theology. Meier imagines this as a two-stage process: after the purely historical project is finished, its results are then handed over to theologians to correlate them with their own subject-specific concerns. For such a division of labour, it is important for the historian to try to keep the level of his own interpretation to an absolute minimum. For Meier, this includes the rejection of formal sociological or cross-cultural models in the analysis of Jesus' social environment because that would go "beyond the description of social data".¹⁰³ Nor is he prepared to reduce the "religious dimension of Jesus' work" to the interplay of social, economic or political forces, although he notes that all these aspects were very much intertwined "in the ancient world in general and in Palestine in particular"¹⁰⁴. The primary aim of reconstruction, for Meier, is the detection of reliable data. Any possibility of a coherent explanation can only arise at the very end of the process of selecting trustworthy material. Meier is deeply distrustful of "holistic" approaches and explanatory models of any kind that claim to illuminate the meaning of the whole but which in his view, often spare themselves the "tedious work of the historian and the exegete."¹⁰⁵ The nature of the evidence requires us to be content with "modest questions and modest claims".¹⁰⁶

The historian, according to Meier, far from allowing his own personality or concerns to affect his reconstruction, should endeavour to bracket them. Meier's

epistemology is not completely naïve, however: he is conscious of the fact that the objectivity he strives for is an "asymptotic goal"¹⁰⁷ that can never fully be reached. The unattainability of total objectivity should not lead the historian into its polar opposite, total relativism. Meier is concerned to find the hedges that would prevent him and other questers from falling into the abyss of "rampant subjectivism", the most important of these being "an honest admission of one's personal stance"¹⁰⁸ but also including "knowing one's sources, having clear criteria, learning from other questers and inviting criticism from one's peers".¹⁰⁹ Although aware of the presence of personal bias, Meier still finds it possible to follow a simple rule: to prescind from "what Christian faith or later Church teaching says about Jesus, without either affirming or denying such claims."¹¹⁰ An important guarantee of disinterestedness is expressed in Meier's fantasy of the "unpapal conclave", "a committee made up of a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew and an agnostic, sober historians all, who were locked up in the bowels of Harvard Divinity School library, put on a Spartan diet, and not allowed to emerge until they have hammered out a consensus document on who Jesus of Nazareth was and what he intended in his own time and place."¹¹¹ By this fantasy Meier intends to symbolise the international and inter-faith co-operation that he considers one of the major gains of the third quest. It is also designed to express the way the limitations of one's particular perspective can be overcome by the mutual criticism of experts who share the criteria of scientific procedure. This idea is reminiscent of the objectives of nineteenth century historiography exemplified by an instruction given to the contributors of *Cambridge Modern History* in 1902: "Our Waterloo must be one that satisfies French and English, Germans and Dutch alike."¹¹² It also reflects Meier's optimism that mature historical criticism can make a dialogue possible "across confessional borders by creating a level playing field of

research with agreed-upon rules for the procedures of historical inquiry that all can share."¹¹³

Meier's insistence on the objectivity and disinterestedness of historical Jesus research does not keep him from assigning contemporary relevance to the enterprise. In the first volume of *A Marginal Jew* Meier rejects the possibility that historical Jesus research could in any way be useful to people of faith, since the direct object of faith is "Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and presently reigning in his Church". Theology, on the other hand, as a cultural artefact within a culture that has been permeated with a historical-critical approach since the Enlightenment, should absorb a historical approach into its methodology in order to "operate in and speak to that culture with credibility".¹¹⁴

In this way, as part of a reflection of theology on what faith in Christ means today, historical Jesus research can serve the interests of faith in 1) giving concrete depth and colour to the content of faith, 2) as a defence against the docetism that swallows up Jesus' real humanity in his divinity, 3) as a defence "against any attempt to "domesticate" Jesus for a comfortable, respectable, bourgeois Christianity" by emphasising the embarrassing, nonconformist aspects of Jesus and 4) by preventing the co-optation of Jesus for programs of political revolution, since "the historical Jesus is remarkably silent on the burning social and political issues of his day. Like good sociology, the historical Jesus subverts not just some ideologies but all ideologies, including liberation theology."¹¹⁵

The question of a metanarrative governing or influencing the reconstruction is more difficult to discern in Meier's case than in Sanders', partly because he refuses to place his data into a large-scale hypothesis that would force his hand, and partly because his multi-volume project is not yet finished. H. Moxnes suggests that Meier's master narrative is connected to his position within American

scholarship as a Roman Catholic scholar. This position reflects the shift of Roman Catholic scholarship from an exclusively church-related setting towards integration within the secular traditions of higher education. Meier's emphasis upon the scientific methods of modern scholarship make his work acceptable within the university, while his insistence on the separation of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith "secures that his research never becomes threatening" for the church.¹¹⁶ Moxnes compares Meier's work to that of his Roman Catholic predecessor, E. Schillebeeckx, about whose contribution Meier, who engages with the ideas of other scholars in great detail, is remarkably silent. Schillebeeckx takes a more positive, and therefore more controversial stand on the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. He argues that historical research recovers material about Jesus that provides the concrete content of faith by revealing God's saving activity in Jesus' life.¹¹⁷

In fact, there is a noticeable tension between the "modest aims" of Meier's research and the oft-repeated disclaimers concerning its relevance for faith, and his insistence on its usefulness to believers and especially theology. He rejects the idea that historical Jesus research may contribute to the content of faith - except for providing it with depth and colour - yet he promotes historical research as a defence against serious distortions such as docetism or ideologies. This suggests that Meier attributes much more importance to the historical Jesus for faith than his stated aims lead us to believe; yet he does not integrate these aspects in his reconstruction. If, for example, historical Jesus research does not affect faith, how can it defend faith from extremes like docetism? Another source of tension is the curious relationship between the minimalist program that is restricted mainly to the gathering of reliable material and the sweeping claims made for this program. In what sense is it obvious, especially in advance, that the data collected will yield a historical Jesus who cannot be domesticated "for a comfortable, respectable,

bourgeois Christianity" or, for that matter, who cannot be coopted "for programs of political revolution"? These questions might well disturb the equilibrium achieved by a careful separation of "science and religion". That this separation does not convince everyone is shown by the fact that Meier's conservative Catholic critics accuse him of establishing the hegemony of science over religion¹¹⁸ whereas others think Meier is too conscious of being a representative of an ecclesiastical community.

The reconstructions of Sanders and Meier illustrate perfectly both the strengths and the weaknesses of traditional, lower case academic history. On the positive side, both are willing to allow a degree of indeterminacy or the presence of incongruous material rather than forcing the pieces of the puzzle to fit at all costs. On the other hand, by stressing the scientific nature of their projects (they present their research as simply following the standard procedures of historical criticism) they claim for them a degree of "of-courseness" that is the trademark of lower case history that presents itself "as if there was only one meaning to "historian" and "the standard methods of historical research".¹¹⁹ Thus the ideological position involved in this approach is hidden by the claim that this is the only "normal" or "professional" way to do history. Postmodern critics maintain that it is exactly this universalising tendency that makes itself the standard of normality is what characterises all ideologies.

Sanders and Meier exhibit another characteristics of lower case history: both define themselves over against their alleged opposite, the overtly ideological upper case constructions that are ruled out from the start from the "level playing field" of scholarly research. For Sanders, the most dangerous forms of upper case histories are those theologies that he perceives as anti-Judaistic, while Meier's animus is directed more against latter-day ideologies like liberation or feminist theology.

As far as the social location of this way of doing history is concerned, Meier's fantasy of the "unpapal conclave" would be a perfect illustration for a postmodern critic. The venue for this meeting is, revealingly, the library of Harvard Divinity School, the participants are all "sober historians" (i.e. in the lower case) who only differ from one another in their religious affiliation, but in all other ways are presumably quite a homogeneous social group. The make-up this group suggests that arriving at a "consensus document" about the historical Jesus is purely a matter of bracketing or balancing out religious differences. No feminist or third world scholar is expected to make any contribution to the venture. In fact, they, with their ideological concerns, are ruled out from the "level playing field" of scholarly research from the start.

1.3.2. Between Modernism and Postmodernism: J. D. Crossan

Among historical Jesus scholars today, it is perhaps J. D. Crossan who has developed the most sophisticated methodological and hermeneutical system designed to safeguard the integrity of history writing while accommodating its postmodern critique. In the preface of *The Historical Jesus* he declares that he is concerned "not with an unattainable objectivity, but with an attainable honesty".¹²⁰ Reflecting on the "stunning diversity" of Jesus portraits that he finds "an academic embarrassment"¹²¹, he proposes the outworking of a common methodology that would provide the starting point for discussing the differences in results and conclusions. Crossan's methodological moves possess a kind of formal rigour reminiscent of the heyday of positivism that imitates the exactness of the "hard" sciences. Expressing his dissatisfaction with current, rather vague ideas about the nature of oral tradition, for example, he proposes a combination of social-scientific

criticism with historical and literary criticism as "the only way to discipline claims about the intersection of memory, orality, and literacy based on an assumed common sense, personal intuition and hypothesis unaccompanied by either theoretical foundation or experimental confirmation." This scientific rigour is necessary, he adds, because "it is time to confront the mystique of the oral Jesus tradition with *some hard and inductive data from checked experience and controlled experiment* (italics mine)."¹²²

This methodological positivism is coupled with the intention of creating an alternative to "hate and love, polemics and apologetics" that sometimes seem to be the "inevitable alternatives for historical Jesus research" where each of these options prejudice the evidence. Crossan aims at an approach that can "bracket either response today and reconstruct what it would have been like to bracket it two thousand years ago".¹²³ He wants to avoid turning history into theology as well as turning history against theology.¹²⁴

This emphasis on scientific methods and empirical evidence has an ambiguous relationship with Crossan's hermeneutical sensitivity to the postmodern challenge. He differentiates his own research from two equally dangerous options. One is the "possible illusion" of *narcissism* of thinking "you are seeing the past or the other when all you see is your own reflected present. You see only what was there before you began." The other is the "impossible delusion" of *positivism* that "imagines that you can know the past without any interference from your personal and social situation as knower."¹²⁵

The third alternative, *interactivism* (which is also the way Crossan understands postmodernism) involves an interaction between the past and the present in which each changes and challenges the other, and the "ideal is an absolutely fair and equal reaction between one another".¹²⁶ "Even our *best* theories

and methods are still *our* best ones (italics in the original)."¹²⁷ Crossan takes issue with N. T. Wright's estimation of his earlier work as a thoroughly modernist affair despite its postmodern tone. He insists that his "complete inventory of the Jesus tradition broken down in terms of independent attestation and stratigraphic location" was intended to serve as a protection against the "disfigurement" caused by bias. "A postmodern sensibility - that is, an equal awareness of your own and your subject's historicity - does not *preclude* but *demand*s attention to method."¹²⁸ The interaction of past and present should take place in public debate using argued evidence, and making one's method as self-critical and self-conscious as possible. This rather than a prior confession of personal situatedness is what counts in Crossan's view.¹²⁹

Crossan's hermeneutics allows him to seek ethical or theological relevance for historical reconstruction, apart from the obvious historical reason (the Mallory principle: "people climb Everest because it is there; people study Jesus because he is there"¹³⁰). He finds it an ethical imperative for Christianity to clearly distinguish between historical and theological statements and distinguish these two from statements that are "ostensibly historical but carry a theological content and were created to do so."¹³¹ Moreover, Crossan sees as an important function of historical Jesus research its role in promoting what he calls "sarcophilic" over against "sarcophobic" Christianity. This distinction concerns what Crossan characterises as the deep fault line in Western sensibility from antiquity onwards between a monistic vision of the human person with body and soul as two sides of the same coin and a dualistic one that considers the body only the temporary lodging of the soul.¹³² Neither is historical reconstruction without contemporary political relevance: Crossan draws a parallel between the Hellenistic cultural imperialism that Palestine had to contend with in Jesus' time and American cultural domination today. "Modernization for many *then* was Hellenization - Greek internationalism - just as modernization for

many *now* is Americanization."¹³³ This identification may partly explain why *empire* is a key term for Crossan's analysis of Jesus' historical context and why he understands Jesus as "a peasant resister to imperial aggression"¹³⁴ (besides his personal experience and memories of growing up "among the first generation of post-colonial Irish in the protected lee of the foundering British Empire")¹³⁵.

H. Moxnes, reflecting on the bewildering variety of disparate cultural and historical material that is only loosely connected to the main theme of *The Historical Jesus*, thinks that the metanarrative informing Crossan's work tends to get lost within this confusing context. Arguably, however, it is precisely this overload of loosely connected and seemingly randomly juxtaposed information that provides a clue to Crossan's master narrative. Moxnes himself notes that Crossan's book represents "a postmodern approach to history-writing"¹³⁶ with its reluctance to resort to traditional historical methods that seek causal connections. I think that Crossan's approach can be defined much more precisely as a perfect example of *New Historicism*.

As S. D. Moore and S. L. Graham point out, there is no indication in Crossan's books that he has ever read the foundational texts of New Historicism, such as Greenblatt's *The Poetics of Culture*.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, all the characteristics of the new historicist approach can be discovered in Crossan's presentation of Jesus. Moxnes may find the wealth of disparate material confusing, but the juxtaposition of these fragments of information is far from accidental; to use one of Crossan's favourite adjectives, it is *calculated*. Examples abound: an excursus on the common sacred abbreviations used in early Christian manuscripts in Chapter 9 of *The Birth of Christianity* helps strengthen the argument for the likelihood of a very early centralised authority in Jerusalem that would explain the unified scribal-exegetical tradition responsible for the "historicised prophecy" of the passion narratives.

Similarly, a cross-cultural analysis of behavioural and ideological sexual differentiation in colonial West Africa, industrialised Europe and first century Lower Galilee on the way to urbanisation and commercialisation in Chapter 11 points forward to the final chapters in which the importance of the "female lament tradition" in the narrativisation of exegesis is emphasised. (The effect is enhanced by the inclusion of a detailed analysis of twentieth-century Irish and Greek female laments.) The unreliability of human memory is demonstrated by "controlled experiments" conducted in contemporary America in which subjects were asked to remember what they were doing at the time of the *Challenger* explosion that showed that the memories the subjects recalled after two and a half years were to a large extent inaccurate and yet were accompanied by a "high degree of confidence" and "visual vividness".¹³⁸ This experiment is invoked to demonstrate that "memory is as much or more a creative reconstruction as accurate reconstruction"¹³⁹. The "scientific" information thus gathered paves the way to a wholesale questioning of the reliability of the oral gospel tradition. Given this general argument, how can the essential trustworthiness of what Crossan calls the Common Sayings Tradition that serves as the basis of Jesus' portrait as egalitarian peasant resister be salvaged from this negative assessment? Only by positing a fundamentally different process of remembering where the guarantee of accuracy is the continuity between "the way" of the radical followers of Jesus with his own lifestyle. "My confidence in reconstructing the historical Jesus does not derive from accuracy of memory or even validity of interpretation among his first companions. It comes from them and Jesus living a common lifestyle that incarnated the kingdom of God on earth."¹⁴⁰

The above examples shed light on another fundamental characteristics of New Historicist writing: the function of historiography as ideological critique and its preoccupation with power relations. Both features dominate Crossan's

reconstruction. His portrayal of Jesus "as instigator of a peasant resistance movement beg redescription as a covert new historicist drama of power, resistance and containment - of Roman state power - and of the state's spectacular ability not only to crush the resistance but, in time, to absorb it into itself."¹⁴¹

The key theme of resistance and containment is ubiquitous in Crossan. It extends from source-critical judgements to tradition history, from history to sociology to cultural anthropology. Almost every aspect of the history of earliest Christianity covers over this hidden dialectic. The author of the Gospel of Mark solved the problem of censoring a *risqué* scene of its predecessor, Secret Mark by removing the offending text and scattering its "dismembered parts throughout the Markan Gospel".¹⁴² The origins of the passion narratives can be found in the conscious conspiracy of scribal Christianity to "hide the prophecy, tell the narrative and invent the history".¹⁴³ The main function of the resurrection narratives is the establishment of apostolic authority. The householders of *Didache* try to control and contain the radicalism of the itinerant prophets by a "serene distinction between *perfection* and *adequacy*".¹⁴⁴ Not incidentally, the same document reveals a shift from the open commensality of Jesus and his companions to "redemptive almsgiving", almsgiving that can "cover over chasms of systemic injustice and structural inequity".¹⁴⁵ Seventy pages later the possibility becomes predictability: "Communal sharing is a far more radical criticism of commercialized community than patronal sharing, because the more individual almsgiving is increased, the more systemic injustice is ignored. Patronal sharing (alms) is an act of power. Communal sharing is an act of resistance."¹⁴⁶ The "ascendancy" of the Eucharist tradition of bread and wine *suppresses* an earlier ritualised bread-and-fish meal "involving Jesus and the believing community as a whole".¹⁴⁷ The apostle Paul, influenced by Platonic dualism (albeit his was a moderate version; he did not reject the body, merely subordinated

it to the spirit) stands at the starting point of what became "sarcophobic" Christianity. His three negated distinctions of ethnicity, class and gender in Gal. 3:28, against this Hellenistic dualistic background, "could apply to ritual present or heavenly future but not to contemporary society or social reality".¹⁴⁸ Yet Paul applies this moderate Platonism rather inconsistently: he takes the class-distinction and the gender-distinction spiritually, but the ethnic distinction physically as well as spiritually. "Had Paul negated *all three* distinctions physically and materially in the urban streets of Roman cities, his life would have been as short as that of Jesus."¹⁴⁹ Since he did not, however, he started a process that, for Crossan, warrants the question: "Is the history of Christianity and especially of Christian theology the long, slow victory of sarcophobic over sarcophilic Christianity?"¹⁵⁰

Strikingly, the examples I have enumerated, although all of them contain the dialectic of resistance and containment or pure, radical impulse and later distortion, are taken from Crossan's estimate of the life and exegetical practice of the early Christians and not the antagonism of Roman imperial power and its resisters. (The obvious counterexample, the story of the rabbinic taming of the memory of the Galilean charismatics Honi and Hanina in fact displays the same process of an established religion regulating and suppressing the dangerous memory of autonomous religious figures.) The connecting link between the two is, for Crossan, the way that in time "the resistance movement will become that which it was designed, ultimately, to resist: the Roman state itself."¹⁵¹ The smaller containment moves exemplified by the exegetical and lifestyle decisions of the earliest communities prepare the way for the ultimate betrayal, which Crossan illustrates by an episode from Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* describing the imperial banquet concluding the Council of Nicaea. Eusebius paints the picture of the bishops reclining at table with the emperor himself in glowing terms: "One might have thought that a

picture of Christ's kingdom was thus shadowed forth, and a dream rather than reality."¹⁵² Although Crossan is careful not to identify the problem as residing in "the move from Jesus to Christ", he still finds it possible that "most inappropriately and unfortunately, imagining Jesus as broker or mediator facilitated" "the move from Christ to Constantine".¹⁵³

One of Crossan's critics is apparently unable to decide whether Crossan considers the development of Christianity as a "rather massive misunderstanding" of "what to do with Jesus", or Crossan is "being coy or is simply unwilling to follow through on the implications of his own work."¹⁵⁴ Indeed, whenever Crossan presents his readers with a dichotomy, he always characterises the option he is about to severely criticise as "perfectly valid". At times, however, he is unequivocally critical of established Christianity:

"The last chapters of the gospels and the first chapters of Acts taken literally, factually, and historically trivialize Christianity and brutalize Judaism. That acceptance has created in Christianity a lethal deceit that sours its soul, hardens its heart, and savages its spirit. Although the basis of all religion and indeed, of all human life is mythological, based on acts of fundamental faith incapable of proof and disproof, Christianity often asserts that its faith is based on fact not interpretation, history not myth, and actual event not supreme fiction. I find that assertion internally corrosive and externally offensive. And because I am myself a Christian, I have a responsibility to do something about it. My reconstruction of the historical Jesus, for example, must be able to show why some people wanted to execute him but others wanted to worship him, why some thought him criminal but others thought him divine. But criminal and divine are not fact but interpretation, one by imperial Rome and the other by early Christianity. To say, therefore, that Jesus is divine means that some group sees in the historical Jesus the manifestation of God.

That historical Jesus must be open to each and every century's public proofs and disproofs, and it is precisely each century's reconstructed historical Jesus that becomes an ever renewed challenge to Christian faith."¹⁵⁵

The last of Greenblatt's "five exemplary moments" is autobiography. Could Crossan's reconstruction of Jesus be called "an exercise in displaced autobiography"?¹⁵⁶ According to New Historicist analysis, a parallel can be drawn between the way Roman imperial power contained the Christian movement and the way "the US is able to defang its intellectual class with a facility that would have left Henry VIII - or Constantine the Great - gasping in admiration, all the while granting this class unfettered "freedom of expression".¹⁵⁷ We can only speculate about whether Crossan sees his own position or the position of American intellectuals in these terms, but an imaginary dialogue between Jesus and himself in *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* is revealing in this respect: 'I've read your book, Dominic, and it's quite good. So, now, are you ready to live by my vision and join me in my programme?' 'I don't think I have the courage, Jesus, but I did describe it quite well, didn't I, and the method was especially good, wasn't it? 'Thank you, Dominic, for not falsifying the message to suit your own incapacity. That is at least something.' 'Is it enough, Jesus?' 'No, Dominic, it is not.'¹⁵⁸

The only remaining feature of New Historicism I have not yet identified in Crossan's work is the opening anecdote. As we have seen, New Historicism uses anecdotes to undermine an established historical narrative. At the beginning of *The Historical Jesus* Crossan *invents* the anecdote in which Jesus "comes as yet unknown into a hamlet of Lower Galilee".¹⁵⁹ As Moore and Graham point out, while "historians normally adduce anecdotes for purposes of explication, Crossan reverses the procedure" and the whole of the book reads as a "five-hundred-page gloss" upon the

one-page introductory scene.¹⁶⁰ In their view, Crossan's fictional anecdote "deftly undercuts his subsequent insistence on rigorous attention to methodology."¹⁶¹ "Although the tail may bristle with historically sounding data, the muscle that wags it is essentially novelistic."¹⁶²

This state of affairs might shed light on the oft-noted tension between Crossan's evident postmodern sensibilities and the modernist, not to say positivist emphasis on the proper methodology. In *The Birth of Christianity* Crossan indignantly quotes L. T. Johnson's charge against him of "fixing the evidence". He protests that an accusation of fixing the data "entails a deliberate intention to deceive" and calls his scholarly integrity in question.¹⁶³ I would argue that the reason for the controversial and idiosyncratic dating and assessment of sources and questionable methodological moves is not necessarily deliberate fraudulence. Crossan's basic view of reality, especially the complex reality of Christianity seems so deeply affected by a "New Historicist" way of seeing things and his ethical objection to what he sees as the betrayal of the original intention of Jesus that it colours, if not governs his exegetical as well as historical decisions. As one of his critics perceptively remarks, "instead of befriending the texts, which are his allies, the critic has turned against them".¹⁶⁴ This excessive use of "the hermeneutics of suspicion" is to be regretted, because it allows those who would deny any social relevance to the historical Jesus to disregard Crossan's sometimes brilliant analysis of the larger anthropological and historical context as well as the ingenious interpretation of important gospel material. A more balanced source criticism would have helped more people access Crossan's thesis, especially since "by both historical and theological standards, Crossan's reconstruction could have accommodated the New Hermeneutic picture of Jesus by placing it in a historical context".¹⁶⁵ In other words, Crossan's larger context could have accommodated a much more moderate reconstruction of

Christian origins. Unfortunately it seems that Crossan's implied audience is more receptive of an extreme radical version of the historical Jesus, which presumably functions as an important part of their group ideology.

1.3.3. Against Modernism and Postmodernism: N. T. Wright

Although from a diametrically opposing standpoint, Wright, as Crossan, engages fully with what he calls "the state of crisis in the humanities"¹⁶⁶. In place of the rival theories developed on the basis of the Enlightenment worldview, the modernist, positivistic and the postmodern, relativist epistemologies¹⁶⁷, he proposes *critical realism*. Critical realism makes it possible to avoid "the false either-or of full certainty versus mere unsubstantiated opinion".¹⁶⁸ Wright rejects both the subjective - objective distinction and the natural - supernatural distinction. He thinks that the tools of an inquiry based on these distinctions are inadequate to the problem of the historical Jesus, therefore a new set of tools is needed. These tools cannot be "those of premodernism anymore than modernism", yet postmodernists fail to offer a solution as well, because they merely "proclaim the death of the Enlightenment worldview" without offering a constructive alternative.¹⁶⁹ Instead of the spurious distinction between objective and subjective, Wright suggests that the proper distinction is between public and private.¹⁷⁰

According to the positivistic model of knowledge a hypothesis is based on gathering sense data and is verified by finding more sense data. This model, Wright argues, is misleading because it leaves the leap of imagination needed for the forming of hypotheses out of account. A good hypothesis is one that has the following features to commend it: it is simple, elegant, includes all the data and

makes sense beyond its immediate subject matter.¹⁷¹ A hypothesis is "essentially a construct, thought up by the human mind, which offers itself as a story about particular sets of phenomena, in which the story, which is bound to be an interpretation of those phenomena, also offers an explanation of them".¹⁷² The requirements of including all the data and constructing a "basically simple and coherent overall picture" are always in tension. Radical portraits of Jesus, like "Jesus the Galilean peasant" purchase their simplicity at the cost of ignoring a good deal of the evidence, while conservative readings include all the data, but "without any historically cogent account of Jesus' aims and intentions". Wright's aim is to include more or less all the data without compromising the objective of a simple and elegant hypothesis.¹⁷³ Ultimately, it is getting in all the data that is more important; removing the evidence or admitting the intractability of the evidence should not be undertaken lightly.¹⁷⁴

Critical realism is essentially a *relational epistemology*: "a way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges *the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence 'realism'), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence 'critical'). This path leads to critical reflection on the products of our enquiry into 'reality', so that our assertions about 'reality' acknowledge their own provisionality. Knowledge, in other words, although in principle concerning realities independent of the knower, is never itself independent of the knower."¹⁷⁵ (italics in the original)

Reality, according to Wright, has an essentially *storied* nature: "stories are more fundamental than facts", therefore individual parts must be seen in the light of the whole story.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, scholars who hold that the gospels contain a

mixture of history and story are guilty of a "patronising positivism".¹⁷⁷ All history is interpreted history, but the historian has an awesome task: following Caird, Wright states that the historian is in some sense like the prophet: he offers a perspective of events which is both his own, and (in aspiration at least) that of God.¹⁷⁸ It would devalue history to think that it means merely the "recounting of those sorts of events which fit within an eighteenth-century worldview". Rather, history is "the meaningful narrative of events and intentions".¹⁷⁹ It follows, Wright suggests, that history and theology are not only not incompatible; rigorous history (which is an open-ended investigation about actual events) and rigorous theology actually belong together¹⁸⁰. All historians, Wright says, have theological presuppositions, atheists and agnostics included. Arguing on the basis of "an unargued modernist or secularist stance a priori, is either naïve, or mischievous, or a naked power-play".¹⁸¹

In the same way, the fact that the gospels are "theological through and through" does not mean they are any less historical: they interpret events.¹⁸² Wright thinks that the "failure to ask about the theological significance of the ministry of Jesus and the failure to treat the gospels with full seriousness as they stand, as stories, is the cause of much present confusion".¹⁸³ Wright is keen to distance the third quest - which he defines more narrowly than e.g. Meier - from the "renewed new quest" practised by Mack, Crossan and the Jesus Seminar, criticising the latter for doing "pseudo-atomistic work on apparently isolated fragments".¹⁸⁴ Third Questers, in contrast, *bypass* this "pseudo-historical use of home-made 'criteria' in a 'real attempt to do history seriously'".¹⁸⁵ Wright rejects the "spurious" idea that an analysis of sayings using "'criteria' of various sorts" can lead to a correct historical understanding. Instead, it is the large hypothesis that provides a justification for smaller-scale decisions as well.¹⁸⁶ The reconstruction starts with the picture of Jesus the Jewish prophet announcing the kingdom of God, and by drawing in more

and more of the evidence, fills in this picture forming a coherent and simple hypothesis. The problem of gospel relations or authentic material cannot be solved in advance, Wright argues, *pace* Crossan. He claims that it is actually a "quite well worked out theory about Jesus and the early church" that in fact dictates the rules of the critical analysis of isolated gospel fragments.¹⁸⁷

In general, Wright thinks that it is historically far more useful to use "emic" categories - categories that the subjects themselves would have recognised - than "etic" ones - categories that we impose upon them.¹⁸⁸ In the case of first century Jewish history the appropriate categories derive from the overarching controlling story of Israel. The coming kingdom of God is not about timeless truths or doctrines or a "new sociological analysis, critique or agenda", rather, it is about Israel's story reaching its climax.¹⁸⁹ As Crossan, Horsley and others, Wright insists that politics and theology are not to be separated in the first century context. In his understanding, however, politics concerns primarily the fate and vocation of Israel as a nation. Jesus' clash with his compatriots concerns their "rival eschatologies": "his kingdom agenda demanded that Israel leave off its frantic and paranoid self-defence and embrace instead the vocation to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth".¹⁹⁰ This militant nationalism was the core problem that also manifested itself in social injustice; "a society that insisted angrily on its own purity toward outsiders would also maintain sharp social distinctions and perpetrate economic and other injustices within itself".¹⁹¹ "Xenophobic nationalism" entailed the oppression of the poor by the rich.¹⁹² Jesus did not merely challenge the local version of the 'domination system' in the person of Roman officials and the Jewish establishment but "the revolutionaries themselves".¹⁹³ The real reason for his conflict with the Pharisees was not that "Judaism was the wrong sort of religion", but rather that "Israel had forgotten her vocation".¹⁹⁴

There is an obvious answer to the question as to the metanarrative guiding Wright's reconstruction: he argues for a seamless continuity between the historical Jesus and early Christianity. His argument requires a wholly new epistemology that is posited as a paradigm shift from both the modernist, positivist paradigm and the phenomenology of postmodernism. This means that Wright's metanarrative is strongly coloured by an anti-Enlightenment polemic. He expresses the significance of Jesus' eschatology ("Jesus' victory on the cross over the principalities and powers that held human beings, societies, enslaved") as a challenge to "the rival eschatology of the Enlightenment, which said that world history reached its climax in Western Europe and North America in the eighteenth century - *and look where that got us* (italics mine) - and the rival eschatology of postmodernity, which is a kind of Götterdämmerung eschatology that says it is all going down the tubes now".¹⁹⁵ Since Wright considers the modernist paradigm entirely faulty, it follows that the assumptions, practices and criteria of critical scholarship are in their entirety replaced ('bypassed') by a new model of hypothesis and verification. (Perhaps it is a vestige of the old positivistic worldview that Wright repeatedly asserts that this new model is the only *serious, rigorous* and *scientific* way of doing history. Also, in spite of affirming that all history writing inevitably involves selection, interpretation and bias, certain openly biased representations of Jesus are ruled out of court. Clive Marsh notes the exclusion of feminist contributors, e.g. Schüssler-Fiorenza from Wright's list of third quest writers.¹⁹⁶ (Even stranger is the absence from the list of third quest contributors of Paula Fredriksen, who is not a feminist scholar and whose *From Jesus to Christ* appears in Wright's bibliography.)

Wright has argued convincingly that a theological interest in the historical Jesus does not rule out a historically valid reconstruction. He also, correctly, points out that a number of historical Jesus scholars conduct their research on the basis of

distinctly anti-theological *a priori*. However, since Wright presents his approach as a rival and replacement, and not merely a modification or criticism, however serious, of the earlier methods of historical criticism, he creates the impression that a historical reading of Jesus that is also a theological reading is incompatible with those methods. Yet the questions posed by gospel relations and tradition history will not go away by simply declaring them invalid. Instead of sweeping generalisations, Wright should be able to show, in detail, why the tools of historical criticism are pseudo-historical, pseudo-atomistic or home-made. Wright's basic category of historical analysis, *story*, has an obvious heuristic value, especially in mapping ancient (or modern) worldviews, but it does not obviate the need for other tools (since history is a problem-solving, not merely a storytelling discipline). This leads to perhaps the most serious problem with Wright's historiography: the question of *verification*. The large-scale hypothesis, Wright argues, provides the justification for smaller-scale decisions, but how can the large-scale hypothesis itself be verified? By showing it manages to get in all the data? But on what basis has the data been selected? Do the simplicity and coherence of the theory finally decide? But what are the criteria of simplicity and elegance?

As far as the actual reconstruction of first century Palestine is concerned, here again the lack of detailed argument dogs the hypothesis. For example, Wright's idea that the social and economic injustice endemic in the land is actually an aspect of the xenophobic nationalism of Israel, is assumed rather than argued. In historiography, such a sweeping statement would certainly require detailed argumentation. Is nationalism the cause of exploitation? Is this a general phenomenon or a local, particular one? Is the presence of imperial Rome indifferent in this respect? Do these violent nationalistic tendencies characterise the people of Israel *en bloc* or only her leaders?

Wright's contention that categories and language that reflect the thinking of the subjects and the period under discussion is preferable to concepts imported from another period appears eminently sensible. A consequent application of this principle, however, is impossible in historiography. The categories a historiographer uses can only be those of his own time, even if they are also a hypothetical approximation of those of the period in question. Even in that case, the hindsight the scholar works with, her knowledge of the consequences of certain events inevitably colours the application of the allegedly original concepts. For example, the supposedly burning issues within Judaism in the first century might only seem so central if we view them from the viewpoint of Jewish-Christian conflict, which does not necessarily reflect their independent importance.¹⁹⁷ Also, the explanatory power of categories that conform to what we think was used in the past is not necessarily greater than that of the more recent models. It is a truism that people living inside a society are typically blind to some of the most important aspects of their own culture that are obvious to outside observers. Hypotheses that make use of the accumulated experience and knowledge of historians or other scholars over the centuries (including the legacy of the Enlightenment) and express these in categories different from those of the primary texts are not *a priori* less suited to exploring the first century than those that purport to work only with "emic" categories.

1.4. Conclusion

As we have seen, the characterisation of the third quest as a purely historical enterprise is simply wrong. It is no less ideologically driven than the previous two quests or the period of "no quest". The misperception is probably the result of the fact that the present quest is not dominated by one particular ideology or theology

but is rather "a collection of local ideological skirmishes"¹⁹⁸, and in this it reflects the varied interests, institutional affiliation and social location of its participants. Historical Jesus studies are undergoing the same shift as history writing in general - or, rather, the "humanities" in general -, from "a hegemonic unity to diversity".¹⁹⁹ (Arguably, this diversity in historical Jesus studies expresses religious and institutional but not ethnic, class or gender differences. Clive Marsh characterises current participants as "an all-male club of wealthy intellectual Euro-American contributors".²⁰⁰)

The recognition and acknowledgement, even foregrounding of ideological interests or personal bias seems unavoidable in view of "the growing recognition that bias is ubiquitous and can never be eliminated"²⁰¹. For this reason, the traditional solution, 'bracketing' personal interests cannot be considered a viable option. Instead, we need to distinguish between the positive and negative effects bias can have on history writing. The question is not whether the result of a reconstruction is a self-portrait of the author (it inevitably is), but, rather, if it is *merely* autobiographical. ("The oft-touted "subjectivity" of historical-Jesus research is simply a function of the fact that, unlike certain other forms of New Testament scholarship, the link here is still patent between who the particular scholar is, including the social grouping(s) to which she or he belongs, and the preferred form(s) into which the Jesus data have been made to fit. Thus, the more honest and precise we can be about exactly what makes the "historical Jesus" worth discussing and what we hope to gain from *our* "Jesus", the better chance there is that our conversation about the historical Jesus will produce not just scholarly smoke but intellectual fire and human warmth."²⁰²) Bias can serve a historian in two ways: it can lead him to impose his own predilections unnaturally upon the subjects of his history, or it can enable her to "rediscover dimensions of the past to which the uninvolved are oblivious. The

personal engagement of the historian in itself guarantees neither the accurate recovery nor the distortion of the past."²⁰³ The great divide is between historians who ignore the data that do not fit their interpretation and historians who do not. In the specific case of historical Jesus research, while many different Jesus portraits can be constructed using the same range of evidence, there are interpretations which are less plausible than others: at the very least, the outer limits of plausibility can be drawn with some accuracy. Perhaps the most usable criterion I have found is the following: "both the agenda that requires the maximal identification of Jesus of Nazareth with the Christ of faith and that which requires their maximal distinction are patently steered by dogma. The task of the historian is the subtler one of arriving at the portrait of Jesus of Nazareth and Christian beginnings that best accounts for all the relevant data by providing the most plausible explanation of how loyalty to the historical Jesus was developed and transformed into the Christological faith of the early churches."²⁰⁴

Another shift has taken place in the emphasis on the relationship of Jesus with his wider social world rather than viewing him only in terms of religious issues. Recent reconstructions do not describe the social world of first century Palestine or the broad social-political patterns in the Roman Empire merely as *background*. Rather, questions such as "how imperial relations may have affected even local-economic-religious forms of family and village life"²⁰⁵ occupy centre stage. The different approaches of social and cross-cultural anthropology are not, however, sufficiently integrated with historical methods. There is a tension between social scientific reasoning that is interested in general trends and models human behaviour by means of ideal types and history, with its emphasis on the particular and the local. For example, it is questionable whether Mediterranean anthropology based on analysis of modern Mediterranean culture can legitimately be projected back to

ancient Palestine. Richard Horsley finds "a more credible continuity of culture from early Israel through the biblical tradition into first century Jewish Palestine".²⁰⁶ Moreover, the application of social and anthropological models to biblical texts and ancient realities usually happens in an *ad hoc*, impressionistic manner. One model is substituted by another without explanation and in perfect agreement with the main thesis. For example, in *The Historical Jesus* Crossan characterises the peasant class in traditional agrarian societies as an egalitarian social formation with its distinctive symbolic universe of brotherhood. Jesus' practice of open commensality is thus at home in, perhaps even derives from this alternative peasant ethos.²⁰⁷ In *The Birth of Christianity*, in contrast, the peasant class is identified as a strictly hierarchical community with "marked social differentiation" in which Jesus as a peasant artisan occupies the lowest position as a "dispossessed peasant, a landless labourer".²⁰⁸ (As a destitute himself, he does not only identify with the poorest of the poor, but is actually identical to them.) Crossan does not reflect on or argue for this change, nor does he explain his reasons for dropping the Cynic label from his characterisation of Jesus. Similarly, Marcus Borg, in his 1984 book *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* interprets Jesus' temple action as a protest against the temple (and the politics of purity) as "the ideological ground of the national liberation movement", whereas in his 1994 *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* he characterises it as "a protest against the Temple as the center of an exploitative social-economic system".²⁰⁹ These examples pose the question of the extent to which these models are allowed to *generate* and not merely *interpret* data. They do not invalidate the models themselves but call attention to the need of submitting them to rigorous testing. It seems, especially in Crossan, that it is in fact cross-cultural anthropology that provides the interpretative grid to which historical question framing is subordinated.

As I have noted earlier, the separation of religious issues from political and social problems and the "narrow focus on religion and the religious individual"²¹⁰ that has dominated traditional modernist scholarship is challenged by recent reconstructions. Scholars like Horsley, Wright, Crossan and Borg rightly note that this separation is anachronistic and it reflects the "modern Western reduction of biblical and related literature to the religious dimension".²¹¹ At the same time the protest of Sanders against paring the gospels down to a non-theological core is entirely justified.²¹² In some recent portraits religion appears as merely the mask of other, "real" socio-political processes. To say, for example, that "for ordinary people religious protest may have been the only way that social, economic or political oppression could be challenged"²¹³ is quite as anachronistic a separation. And how can ritual and justice be separated in ancient Israel by stating that "while there is no problem in finding biblical prophetic statements in which God rejects worship in the absence of justice, there is not a single biblical statement in which God rejects justice in the absence of worship"?²¹⁴

Finally, recent reconstructions of the historical Jesus can be evaluated from the standpoint of theology. As we have seen, it is no longer possible to argue that theologically motivated historical study must be ruled out of court because it is not sufficiently 'objective'. Does this mean, however, that theological interpretation can be woven into historical reconstruction without damaging the tissue of either theological or historical argumentation or both? Can history be of use to theology if it is not allowed to argue according to its own distinctive logic? The serious problems with Wright's reconstruction are a reminder that an impeccable theory of epistemology that, correctly, allows for the coexistence of theology and history does not guarantee a practice where the interplay of the two is not detrimental to either. This means that the admission of a theological interest does not exempt us from the

need to discriminate between the kinds of theological *a priori* that are compatible with historical inquiry and the ones that are not. I think that the 'article of faith' adequate here is the assertion that "in having to do with Jesus we have to do with God".²¹⁵ This statement is one whose truth cannot be established or disproved by historical research, which shows the limitations of historical inquiry. At the same time it indicates the significance of history in keeping our interest alive in the concrete content of this affirmation. Importantly, it does not prescribe any historical method that should be followed or subject matter that should be included or excluded. It suggests that every piece of information that can be gleaned about Jesus and his world is theologically important, be it religious, economic, social or political. (Other, more 'specific' theological *a priori* have turned out to be fallacious, hindering rather than assisting historical research. Anti-Judaistic *a priori* that used Judaism as a dark backdrop for Jesus' distinctiveness come readily to mind, but the rationalistic bias against the occurrence of miracles is also a case in point.)

The development of historiography and especially its postmodern critique have alerted scholars to the extent that historical research is essentially the construction of the historian. In the special case of historical Jesus research the situation is further complicated by the fact that as soon as material deemed authentic is taken out of its original literary context within a gospel, it needs to be reassembled into a new, coherent story. This new story is not only speculative to a great extent, requiring imagination and guesswork, but it also implicitly functions as a Christological statement that is presented as an alternative to the evangelists' Christologies. The clearest example of this replacement of traditional Christological assertions with a rival Christology can be found in Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*: "...one cannot dismiss it or the search for the historical Jesus as *mere* reconstruction, as if reconstruction invalidated somehow the entire project. Because there is *only*

reconstruction...If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in."²¹⁶ According to Robert Morgan, the fact that historical reconstructions compete with traditional Christologies "neither invalidates the quest nor excuses theologians from taking it seriously", but it allows New Testament theology "to retain the evangelists' own Christological frameworks and...to build into its interpretations further historical information. This *piecemeal* insertion of reliable historical information does not aim at a complete historical account of Jesus, for which the data is in any case fragmentary, but remains subject to the aims of theological interpretation."²¹⁷(italics mine) Morgan thinks that the historians' constructions are "legitimate, indeed necessary in historical research", but "they are fragile as Christological assertions".²¹⁸

Yet even this piecemeal appropriation of historical reconstructions requires a set of critical and self-critical criteria that prevents an arbitrary selection of historical information that fit into a given theological framework. A distinction between good history and bad history - for example, by paying attention to the rules of the logic of historical inquiry listed earlier in this chapter - is an essential part of this process. "While many Jesuses must yet be performed, it does not mean that any Jesus will do."²¹⁹

1 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 2

2 J. P. Meier: "The Present State of the "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain" *Biblica* 80 (1999) p. 463.

3 *ibid.*

4 Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* p. 6

5 As far as I know, the only such attempt to date is Halvor Moxnes' 1998 essay "The Historical Context of Jesus Studies" that I have read as an abstract of *The Biblical Theology Bulletin* Vol. 28 and to which I am indebted both for several important insights into the relationship of the third quest and historiography and for drawing my attention to some excellent 'state of the art' reviews, notably Iggers and Appleby/Hunt/Jacob.

6 Joyce Appleby/Lynn Hunt/ Margaret Jacob: *Telling the Truth about History*, W.W. Norton & Company New York/London, 1995 p.29.

7 *ibid.* p. 53, 56.

8 *ibid.* p. 60

9 *ibid.* p. 66.

10 Georg Iggers: *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, Wesleyan University Press Hanover/London 1997 p. 25.

11 *ibid.* p. 28

12 *ibid.* p. 36. (Ranke's idea of 'Einfühlung')

13 Appleby/Hunt/Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* pp. 78-84.

14 *ibid.* 153.

15 Alun Munslow: *Deconstructing History*, Routledge, London, 1997 pp. 20-25.

16 as in Keith Jenkins' Introduction to *The Postmodern History Reader* Routledge, London, 1997

17 *ibid.* p. 5.

18 In Chapter 5 of Appleby/Hunt/Jacob *Telling the Truth about History*, "Discovering the Clay Feet of Science" the authors draw attention to the importance of Newton's religious beliefs in the development of his theory of universal gravitation. Similarly, Darwin's ideas about evolution were deeply influenced by the Malthus' theory of the population survival of the strongest as well as the "social attitudes of imperial and market-oriented society" (p. 184.) with its reformist impulses but strong beliefs of the economic and moral superiority of Western man.

19 "...historians...seek to expand and complicate the collective memory beyond the utilitarian limits of consensus-building. In doing so they may well turn up information that undermines a nation's self-congratulatory image or challenges a group's cherished beliefs about its past." Appleby/Hunt/Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* p. 156.

20 An early forerunner of putting the question in these terms is, of course, Friedrich Nietzsche, who characterised the search for truth as basically will-to-power masquerading as knowledge.

21 The term 'problematisation' or 'problematicisation' refers to the postmodern strategy of revealing the culturally or ideologically constructed nature of institutions and other social phenomena that mask their will-to-power by appearing as natural or divinely ordained.

22 Appleby/Hunt/Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*. p. 212

23 This argument in fact radicalises the linguist F. de Saussure's theory about the arbitrary relationship between the referent and the linguistic sign in language.

24 Hayden White: "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth" in: *The Postmodern History Reader*, pp. 392-396.

25 Keith Jenkins quotes Lyotard on the pervasive "incredulity towards meta-narratives". ("Introduction", p.5.)

26 *ibid.* 232. Possible examples are the heroic model of progress through science, Marxism, liberalism, even postmodernism, the authors argue.

27 "We now appreciate that an upper case history is a formal and thus empty mechanism to be filled according to taste." (Keith Jenkins, "Introduction", p. 5.)

28 *ibid.* pp. 12-14.

29 *ibid.* p.1.

30 *ibid.* p. 10. Jenkins quotes McLennan.

31 *ibid.* p. 13.

32 *ibid.* p. 15.

33 cf. Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History"

34 Keith Jenkins, Introduction p. 15.

35 *ibid.*

36 Significantly, New Historicism originated within literary studies rather than historiography. It must be noted, however, that some New Historians dissociate themselves from postmodernism, because in their view it is "excessively aesthetic and insufficiently revolutionary" (see Himmelfarb, p. 172).

37 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, p. 11

38 S.D. Moore "History after Theory? Biblical Studies and New Historicism" p. 292. in: *Biblical Interpretation* 5.4, 1997 on Greenblatt's Poetics of Culture

39 the quoted expressions are from Moore, p. 291. and 293.

40 S.L. Graham/S. D. Moore: "The Quest of the New Historicist Jesus" p. 449. in: *Biblical Interpretation* 5.4, 1997

41 *ibid.* p. 445.

42 *ibid.* p. 443.

43 G. Himmelfarb: "Telling It as You Like It: Postmodernist History and the Flight from Fact" in: *The Postmodern History Reader* p. 158.

44 *ibid.* 169.

45 *ibid.* 173.

46 *ibid.*

47 Christopher Norris: "Postmodernizing History: Right-Wing Revisionism and the Uses of Theory" in: *The Postmodern History Reader* p. 93.

48 *ibid.* p. 102.

49 N. Geras, "Language, Truth and Justice", *New Left Review*, 209, 1995, p.110, p. 125. (quoted in Keith Jenkins, p. 23.)

50 D. H. Fisher: *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Truth* Routledge&Kegan Paul, London, 1971

51 *ibid.* p. xv.

52 *ibid.* p. 38.

53 *ibid.* p. 29.

54 *ibid.* p. 62.

55 *ibid.*

56 *ibid.* 53.

57 *ibid.* p. 100.

58 *ibid.* p. 137.

59 *ibid.* p. 143.

60 *ibid.* p. 155.

61 *ibid.* p. 157.

62 *ibid.* p. 175.

63 *ibid.* p. 214.

64 *ibid.* p. 251.

65 *ibid.* p. 306.

66 *ibid.* p. 181.

67 Keith Jenkins, Introduction, p. 7, quoting Lyotard's *The Differend*

68 Hans Kellner: "Language and Historical Representation" in *The Postmodern History Reader* p 127.

69 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* p. 12.

70 *ibid.* p. 14.

71 Hans Kellner referring to White in "Language and historical Representation" p. 131.

72 Iggers, p. 145.

73 Clive Marsh: "Quests of the Historical Jesus in New Historicist Perspective" in: *Biblical Interpretation* 5.4, 1997 p. 405.

74 Appleby/Hunt/Jacob: *Telling the Truth about History* p. 269.

75 H. Moxnes ' illuminating example is the Balkan conflict: "The use of history to support exclusivist claims to ethnic identity among competing groups in the Balkans is a case in point. " in: "The Historical Context" p. 3.

76 Appleby/Hunt/Jacob: *Telling the Truth about History* p. 261.

77 *ibid.* p. 281.

78 *ibid.* p. 283.

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- 79 J. D. Crossan: *The Birth of Christianity* HarperSanFrancisco, 1998 p. 23
- 80 Luke T. Johnson: *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1996 passim.
- 81 R. Crotty: *The Jesus Question* HarperCollins religious Blackburn, Victoria 1996 p. 220.
- 82 *ibid.* p. 223.
- 83 James Peter: *Finding the Historical Jesus* Collins, London, 1965 p. 116-7.
- 84 Gerd Theissen: "Historical Scepticism and the Criteria of Jesus Research" in: *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49, 1996 p. 171.
- 85 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 330.
- 86 *ibid.* p. 331.
- 87 *ibid.* p. 334.
- 88 *ibid.* p. 334.
- 89 Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* p. 5.
- 90 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 330.
- 91 *ibid.* p. 331
- 92 *ibid.* p. 265
- 93 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 340
- 94 In his paper "Jesus in Historical Context" (*Theology Today* 50, 429-48) Sanders rejects both Horsley's model of escalating conflict and violence and the picture of a highly urbanised, Hellenised Galilee that appears in e.g. B. Mack's reconstruction.
- 95 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 342.
- 96 *ibid.* p. 343.
- 97 Moxnes: "The Historical Context..." p. 8.
- 98 Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* p. 96.
- 99 *ibid.* p. 178.
- 100 Meier, "The Present State of..." p. 463.
- 101 *ibid.* p. 460.
- 102 *ibid.* p. 463.
- 103 Meier, *A Marginal Jew* Vol. 1. p. 10.
- 104 *ibid.* p. 11.
- 105 *ibid.* p. 194. note 66.
- 106 *ibid.* p. 510.
- 107 *ibid.* p. 4.

108 *ibid.* Meier thinks that the greatest temptation for him is to "read back the expanded universe of later church teaching into the "big bang" moment of Jesus' earthly ministry."

109 *ibid.*

110 *ibid.* p. 1.

111 *ibid.* and "The Present State of..." p. 463.

112 quoted from Appleby/Hunt/Jacob: *Telling the Truth about History* p. 76 in Moxnes : "The Historical Context..." p. 5

113 "The Present State of..." p. 463.

114 Meier, *A Marginal Jew* Vol. 1. p. 198.

115 *ibid.* p. 199.

116 Moxnes: "The Historical Context..." p. 6

117 *ibid.*

118 e.g. L. T. Johnson *The Real Jesus* pp.126-33 cf. Moxnes p, 6.

119 Moxnes p. 7.

120 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. xxxiv

121 *ibid.* xxviii

122 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 58

123 *ibid.* p. 23.

124 *ibid.* p. 138.

125 *ibid.* p. 41.

126 *ibid.* p. 42.

127 *ibid.* p. 43.

128 *ibid.* p. 45.

129 *ibid.* p. 212.

130 *ibid.* p. 22.

131 The Meaning of Jesus Six scholars explain why they study the origins of Christianity - and why it matters. panel discussion [www. Christianity Today. com](http://www.ChristianityToday.com) p. 9

132 *ibid.* p. 10.

133 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* xxii

134 Fourth R J. D. Crossan Autobiography [www. westarinstitute. org](http://www.westarinstitute.org). p. 2.

135 *ibid.*

136 Moxnes p. 13.

137 Moore/Graham: "The Quest...." p. 454.

138 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 61-63.

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- 139 *ibid.* p. 59.
- 140 *ibid.* p. 404.
- 141 Moore, "History after Theory" p. 297.
- 142 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 415.
- 143 *ibid.* p. 372.
- 144 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 401.
- 145 *ibid.* p. 402.
- 146 *ibid.* p. 472.
- 147 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 399.
- 148 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. xxiv.
- 149 *ibid.* xxv.
- 150 *ibid.* p. 46.
- 151 Moore/Graham: "The Quest..." p. 455.
- 152 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 424.
- 153 *ibid.*
- 154 Larry A. Hurtado: "A Taxonomy of Recent Historical-Jesus Work" in: *Whose Historical Jesus?* ed. W.E. Arnal Michel Desjardins Studies in Christianity and Judaism Number 7, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997 p. 289.
- 155 Fourth R, p. 6.
- 156 Moore/ Graham: "The Quest..." p. 455.
- 157 *ibid.* p. 454.
- 158 Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* p. xiv.
- 159 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. xi By the conscious echo of Albert Schweitzer in the opening sentence, Crossan indicates clearly the types of historical narratives he will proceed to undermine.
- 160 Moore/Graham: "The Quest..." p. 457.
- 161 *ibid.* p. 458.
- 162 *ibid.* p. 459.
- 163 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 114.
- 164 Frans Jozef Van Beeck, S.J. "The Quest of the Historical Jesus: Origins, achievements and the specter of diminishing returns" in: Carlson & Ludwig eds.: *Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N. Y., 1994 p. 92.
- 165 *ibid.* p. 94.
- 166 Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* p. 31.
- 167 Postmodern relativism, Wright argues, is simply the dark side of positivism.

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- 168 Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* p. 33
- 169 *ibid.* p. 97.
- 170 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 117.
- 171 *ibid.* p. 42.
- 172 *ibid.* p. 99.
- 173 *ibid.* p. 100.
- 174 *ibid.* p. 106. Wright criticises scholars who give in to the pressure of jettisoning gospel texts "in the interests of a particular hypothesis".
- 175 *ibid.* p. 35.
- 176 *ibid.* p. 84
- 177 *ibid.* p. 83. Wright mentions Nineham as an example here.
- 178 *ibid.* note 22. p. 91.
- 179 *ibid.* p. 93.
- 180 *ibid.* p. 8.
- 181 Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (with Marcus J. Borg) London, SPCK, 1999. p. 17.
- 182 Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* p. 95.
- 183 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 15.
- 184 *ibid.* p. 33.
- 185 *ibid.* p. 86., 84.
- 186 *ibid.* p. 69.
- 187 Wright/Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus* p. 23.
- 188 *ibid.* p. 226.
- 189 *ibid.* p. 35.
- 190 *ibid.* p. 42.
- 191 *ibid.* p. 36.
- 192 *ibid.*
- 193 *ibid.*
- 194 *ibid.* p. 94.
- 195 Meaning of Jesus online p. 5.
- 196 Clive Marsh: "The Quest..." p. 418.
- 197 William E. Arnal: "Making and Re-making the Jesus sign: Contemporary Markings on the Body of Christ" in: *Whose Historical Jesus* p. 311
- 198 C. Marsh: "The Quest..."p. 425.

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- 199 Moxnes: "The Historical...." p. 14.
- 200 Marsh p. 417.
- 201 W. Arnal: "Making and..." p. 316.
- 202 Leif E. Vaage : "Recent Concerns: The Scholar as Engagè" in: *Whose Historical Jesus* p. 181-2.
- 203 Stephen Westerholm: "The Christ of Faith: Context" in: *Whose Historical Jesus* p. 238.
- 204 *ibid.* p. 240.
- 205 R. A. Horsley: "Innovation in Search of Reorientation" p. 1146.
- 206 *ibid.* p. 1138.
- 207 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 263.
- 208 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 350.
- 209 Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* p. 115. In note 72. p. 125. Borg himself notes this change but does not give reasons for it.
- 210 Horsley : "Innovation...." p. 1129.
- 211 *ibid.*
- 212 Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* p. 97.
- 213 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 135.
- 214 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 205. It is quite anachronistic of Crossan to imagine a situation in ancient Israel - albeit hypothetically- in which the idea that justice could be done without reference to worship would make sense.
- 215 Robert Morgan: "The Historical Jesus and the Theology of the New Testament" in: *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright, Oxford, Clarendon, 1987. p. 193. Morgan thinks that this is in fact the only 'dogma' of Christianity.
- 216 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 426.
- 217 Morgan: "The Historical...." p. 197-8.
- 218 *ibid.* p. 199.
- 219 Clive Marsh: "The Quest...." p. 433.

Chapter 2.

Criteria of Authenticity

2.1. Introduction

With the exception of John P. Meier and, to a certain extent, J. D. Crossan, scholars in the third quest do not normally emphasise the use of the criteria of authenticity. Rather, they seek a point of entry into the problem of the historical reconstruction of Jesus' ministry from the direction of the general issues of historical context. This reluctance to get involved in "criteriology" is partly due to the obvious failure of the new quest to fruitfully employ the criteria in their reconstructions. Also, it is more and more clearly recognised that the use of criteria is, to a large extent, a rationalisation after the fact.

"It may be that the most creative scholars do not carry out research by establishing rules and then obeying them. When they encounter an item of evidence their total knowledge of the situation is brought into play, and suddenly this new item falls into place with a little click in one or another of the available slots. The rules of the game, or criteria, then serve as rationalisations for what has happened. For the outsider they serve also as a check on the plausibility of the almost unconscious decision made by the creative researcher."¹

This possibility, however, for outsiders to check the plausibility of the scholars' decision is important enough to warrant the need for a clear presentation of the exegetical justifications for decisions about historicity. Even though the probability of agreement on a set of commonly used criteria in historical Jesus research is slight indeed, the tendency to bypass both the use and the discussion of

the criteria is to be regretted. "...it is precisely because we are so prone to error in judging the people around us, and must be even more prone to error when it comes to sizing up someone from another time and place, that we manufacture indices and discuss methodology. We wish, if not to escape our subjectivity and fallibility, at least to be self-critical as well as honourable with the evidence, so as to come as close as we can to an approximation of what Jesus was all about."²

2. 2. Criteria of Authenticity in the New Quest

The old, liberal quest of the nineteenth century had no particular need to develop criteria that could be used in distinguishing authentic Jesus material from later modifications, because the basic confidence in the reliability of the synoptic tradition, especially the Markan framework was still intact. Once this confidence was shaken, however, a much greater variety of methods and interpretations came into being, and in certain strands of gospel research a much greater scepticism concerning the possibility of a reconstruction of Jesus' career. Those who questioned the reliability of Mark felt compelled to go behind the gospel texts and plot the complex process of the transmission of the tradition between Jesus and the gospels.³ For form critics, especially Rudolf Bultmann, the aim of this study was not to find a core of authentic material on which an interpretation of Jesus could be founded, but rather the formal classification of the material found in the gospels and a charting of the history of the tradition. Bultmann was not interested in setting up a number of rigid criteria, like some of his followers in the new quest; for him the general process of reconstructing the history of the synoptic tradition was primary.⁴ Mapping this

history, form criticism worked with the dichotomies of Palestinian vs. Hellenistic communities and the original form vs. subsequent modifications, trying to trace the theological tendencies governing the process.⁵ It is in this respect that finding a group of distinctive sayings became important. The ambiguity of Bultmann's position is apparent in the fact that while he considered it not only theologically irrelevant to inquire after the Jesus of history but also historically impossible ("What the sources offer us is first of all the message of the early Christian community which, for the most part, the church freely attributed to Jesus."⁶), he was nevertheless interested in finding the oldest layer of the tradition, the "centre which holds the secret of [the tradition's] historical power".⁷ This centre is not the personality of Jesus (which cannot and should not be searched for), and so Jesus' name could be placed between quotation marks "as an abbreviation for the historical phenomenon with which we are concerned".⁸ Rather, the distinctiveness of the oldest layer lies in its capacity to create for us an encounter with history, by virtue of its combination of an "acute eschatological consciousness with its combined gladness and gravity in the face of decision".⁹ This unique combination was for Bultmann the sign of the genuine teaching of Jesus. "We can only count on possessing a genuine similitude of Jesus where, on the one hand, expression is given to the contrast between Jewish morality and piety and the distinctive eschatological temper which characterised the preaching of Jesus; and where on the other hand we find no specifically Christian features."¹⁰ This emphasis on the double dissimilarity of the teaching of Jesus as well as an existentialist insistence on the urgency of decision became Bultmann's legacy for the new quest that in many ways sought to go beyond his exclusive emphasis on the kerygma of the early church.

It was Ernst Käsemann's famous address on "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" that both recapitulated the findings of form criticism that could not

be disregarded in a search for the historical Jesus and voiced the need to "counteract the drastic separation or even antithesis of kerygma and tradition".¹¹ Käsemann admits that the gospels were not written primarily as reportage, but argues that there is no complete discontinuity between the witness of the community and Jesus, since the mere fact that the gospels exist prove the community's vital interest in maintaining its links with Jesus, in its refusal to "allow myth to take the place of history".¹² It is because the gospels are the documents of the early community's "war on two fronts", against the "docetism of the enthusiasts and the kenosis doctrine of the historicisers"¹³ that so much of their material intertwines kerygma and history. Käsemann connects the legitimacy and the need to do historical study *now* to what he considers the main reason for the creation of the gospels themselves: by cleaving firmly to history, the early community expressed the *extra nos* of salvation.¹⁴ For Käsemann, the motivation behind historical research is deeply theological: criticism, just like the early church, must assert the identity of the earthly Jesus and the exalted Lord, without neglecting the former for the latter (as in Bultmann's case) or substituting the latter with the former (which provoked Käsemann's intense criticism of Joachim Jeremias' work).¹⁵ This identity is expressed in striking terms: "the life history of Jesus was constitutive for faith, because the earthly and exalted Lord are identical."¹⁶ Käsemann seems to identify the main danger threatening the church then and now as the "twin terrors of docetism and myth".¹⁷

Because form criticism has shattered the faith of scholars in the reliability of the synoptic tradition, Käsemann argues, the obligation is laid upon critics to prove the genuineness and not the inauthenticity of individual pieces of the tradition. The issue is not whether criticism is right in doing so, but rather where it is to stop.¹⁸ This is why the outworking of a rigorous method becomes paramount in

the new quest; the stakes are much higher than for Bultmann, who could look calmly on while the pieces of the tradition were burning on the critical bonfire. Käsemann recognises that the bewildering confusion of differing Jesus-portraits in scholarship is partly due to the fact that all these possibilities are actually contained in the tradition.¹⁹ He also realises that since the formal characteristics of the pericopae are not much help in determining the authenticity of the material contained within them, the criteria must be found elsewhere. Similarly to Bultmann, Käsemann's dominant criterion is dissimilarity: "In only one case do we have more or less safe ground under our feet; when there are no grounds either for deriving the tradition from Judaism or for ascribing it to primitive Christianity, and especially when Jewish Christianity has mitigated or modified the received tradition, as having found it too bold for its taste."²⁰ Although this definition is rather problematic both as a whole and in each of its elements, the main reason for its introduction by Käsemann is that he is convinced that Jesus cannot be classified according to the categories of psychology or the history of religions; he can be placed only in terms of historical particularity. "To this extent the problem of the historical Jesus is not our invention but the riddle which he himself sets us."²¹ Käsemann's formulation of the criterion of dissimilarity has been rightly criticised for its distorted picture of Judaism as well as its reductionism. If we look more closely at the way he employed the criterion in his programmatic essay, we find that the exegetical assertions he made on its basis do not always stand up to closer scrutiny. Barry Henaut draws attention to the fact that Käsemann's acceptance of the first, second and fourth antitheses from the Sermon on the Mount has not fared well. "These verses are no longer accredited to Jesus precisely because of their sociological tie with the early churches' need to promulgate their own Torah and because of their implicit proclamation of Jesus as a new Moses (yet one beyond Moses in office and authority)."²² Similarly, the Sabbath incident of

Mark 2:23-28 and the defilement sayings of Mark 7:1-23 arguably reflect a later situation, because they "do not show a distinctiveness against the practice of the early churches (as required for attribution to Jesus on the grounds of this criterion); they agree entirely with Paul's theology as expressed in Galatians."²³ (It must be noted, however, that the defilement sayings in Mark 7 can be assigned a different interpretation, see Borg's analysis in Chapter 3.) Finally, the problem of Käsemann's attribution to Jesus of modern attitudes must be noted. He describes Jesus as one who rejected the distinction between sacred and profane, as well as the existence of demonic powers. These reconstructions, Henaut warns, are "almost entirely dependent upon Käsemann's own predispositions and assumptions, and amount to a Christological portrait based on 20th-century assumptions".²⁴

The hegemony of the criterion of dissimilarity continued throughout the period of the new quest, to the extent of becoming a dogmatic assertion in studies like Norman Perrin's *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*. He considers it "the strongest criterion for authenticity that contemporary research has found"²⁵ because it is dictated by the nature of the Synoptic tradition, where the burden of proof must always be upon the claim to authenticity.²⁶ Other criteria are also employed, but only as supplements to this foundational criterion. Perrin recognises that the dissimilarity test is limited in scope, but he thinks that "the brutal fact of the matter is that we have no choice, no other starting point..."²⁷ He then allows the criterion of coherence to gather material from areas where dissimilarity is not applicable, but only in accord with the authentic core established by the main criterion. Perrin is suspicious of the criterion of multiple attestation, because he thinks that it rests on the presupposition that "to take one step behind the sources is to arrive at firm historical tradition about Jesus",²⁸ with which he does not agree.

In view of the dominance of the criterion of dissimilarity and the

influence of existentialist philosophy it is not surprising that the full-scale reconstructions produced in the new quest are not concerned with presenting a chronologically ordered development of Jesus' ministry, but rather concentrate on a few key issues which they see as connecting links between the history of Jesus and the kerygma. "Our task is to seek the history in the kerygma and in this history to seek the kerygma"²⁹ says Günther Bornkamm. This history can be found in the hard core of authentic sayings in the gospels, which show "the person and work of Jesus, in their unmistakable uniqueness and distinctiveness....Understood in this way, the primitive tradition of Jesus is brim full of history."³⁰

2.3. Criticism and Refinement of the Criteria after the New Quest

Parallel to and following the period of the new quest, some of the assumptions of form criticism came under severe questioning. We have seen that already Ernst Käsemann realised that the form of a given pericope is not a reliable guide to the authenticity of the tradition contained within it. Thus any analysis of the gospel material had to concentrate on the content of the texts in question. This brought about a decline in the use of the formal criteria, especially with respect to the so-called "tendencies" of the oral tradition that Rudolf Bultmann had stressed so strongly. It became clear, as E. P. Sanders' *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (1969) showed, that the laws that allegedly governed the formation of the tradition from simpler, barer forms towards more embellished ones actually worked both ways: tradition could be shortened as well as lengthened, names could be lost as well as added and so on.

Other criticisms were more fundamental, and concerned not just the practical aspects of tradition-historical work but also some of its basic tenets. Oscar

Cullmann warned against the effects of the harmful alliance between form criticism and existentialist exegesis, especially the role played by existentialism in finding the connecting link between the historical Jesus and the kerygma in Jesus' call to decision, and using existentialist exegesis as the real criterion in deciding what is authentic (cf. Bultmann's version of the dissimilarity criterion).³¹

Also, while few scholars doubted the truth of the form critical insight that the early communities played a formative role in the shaping of the material, opinions diverged as to the extent of the creativity of the early church. J. D. G. Dunn argued that a wholesale invention of "countless" prophetic I-sayings and their attribution to the earthly Jesus was unlikely in view of the caution exercised in the early communities in judging prophetic utterances and in working out criteria by which to evaluate them.³² Gerald Downing asks the question why, if the Spirit-Lord was authoritative in the "now" of the early communities, his sayings needed to be cast as past utterances. "*Ex hypothesi*, that should not be necessary."³³ Several scholars pointed out the conservative tendencies of the gospel tradition that acted as a check upon the creativity of the community. The most important among these is the noticeably high view toward the traditions in the New Testament (e.g. Rom 6:17, 1Cor 7:10 etc.), the faithfulness of the early church in transmitting difficult sayings while at the same time several of their major problems (circumcision, purity laws) are not reflected in the gospel material.³⁴

The circularity of some major form critical arguments also came under attack, especially the way the forms of the pericopae were used to establish the "Sitz im Leben" of the community, and then these same life settings were used in the explanation of the forms.³⁵ While a measure of circularity is inevitable in historical research (we base our picture on the available evidence and explain this evidence on the basis of our picture), some critics judged that the circularity involved in form

criticism was damaging, especially in view of the fact that "the method has not been able to produce an even largely acceptable distribution of the material between Jesus and the early church".³⁶

Simultaneously to the criticism of the general assumptions of form criticism, the use of the individual criteria also attracted considerable attention, as the large number of "criteriological" articles testifies. Despite the problems posed by the inefficiencies of form criticism, there was some optimism concerning the continued usefulness of the historical critical method. As the theological burden of the quest lessened, it became possible to argue that the study of the historical Jesus can be carried out by using the same norms and principles that are in widespread use in the study of historical figures, by means of historical criteria alone.³⁷ Yet some of the criteria used by the New Quest required serious modification, especially the tyranny of the negative criteria in general and the criterion of dissimilarity in particular.

2.3.1. The Dissimilarity Test

This criterion, especially its negative form used by Käsemann and Perrin, has some obvious flaws. It detaches Jesus both from his Jewish contemporaries and the early church. Also, it is biased towards what is distinctive in the teaching of Jesus, which is not necessarily identical with what is characteristic of it. This method presupposes a fairly confident knowledge of both first century Judaism and primitive Christianity: the two "knowns" from which the "unknown" of Jesus can be deduced.³⁸ The errors produced by the criterion are magnified if the criterion of coherence is used in conjunction with it, because it can only admit material which conforms to the already distorted picture gained by the use of

dissimilarity.³⁹

Most new questers acknowledge the one-sidedness of the criterion as well as the fact that the teaching of Jesus overlaps with both Judaism and the early church, but because of their radical scepticism toward the sources they think that the nature of the material demands not only its use but also its primacy. In order to avoid the charge of subjectivity and arbitrariness which could be levelled against the old questers, they felt the need to develop a criterion which is as rigorous as possible. Yet the theological presupposition that may lie behind the use of this criterion presents a serious problem: distancing Jesus from his fellow Jews sometimes means presenting him as superior to them.⁴⁰ Also, the definition of the criterion employed by e.g. Perrin seems unnecessarily complicated. The only channel for the influence of Judaism on Christianity was Christianity itself, so it would be "incongruous to assume that Christians borrowed concepts from Judaism which differed from their own views".⁴¹ In other words, the negative form of the criterion "errs by excess": "That the community should gratuitously adopt from Judaism elements in discontinuity with its own concerns, practices, and tendencies simply does not make sense. Discontinuity with the post-paschal church is sufficient by itself to establish historicity."⁴²

Despite the serious limitations of the dissimilarity test, most scholars are reluctant to dismiss it altogether because of its obvious usefulness in its positive form in ascertaining a "critically assured minimum".⁴³ The cautious use of the criterion does not mean that material that does not meet it is to be disregarded; it is merely temporarily placed on one side, because the distinctive material is "less likely to have been wrongly attributed to Jesus".⁴⁴ In general, the division of material into two groups, authentic vs. inauthentic is not justified. "It would be foolish to suppose that Jesus' views did not overlap at numerous points both with contemporary

Judaism and with Christians beliefs."⁴⁵ The concentration on the distinctive teaching of Jesus does not necessarily entail a negative bias towards Judaism, however; it merely helps account for the transition from Judaism to Christianity.⁴⁶ The use of the test can be supplemented not only by the criterion of **coherence**, but also by that of **embarrassment**. (Not that this latter criterion is entirely unproblematic: Dale C. Allison draws attention to the fact that all the "embarrassing" statements are actually found in the Jesus tradition, which means that "they were not sufficiently disconcerting to be expurgated".⁴⁷) A good example where the dissimilarity criterion can be employed is Matt 18:17, which shows both a reversion to an outlook characteristic of an exclusivist strand of Judaism and a concept of the church which reflects later Christianity.⁴⁸

The fact that we do not know enough of either Judaism or the early church should not deter scholars from the judicious use of this criterion either: it merely reflects the provisional nature of the results of historical study⁴⁹, and the fact that it can arrive at only probable and never certain conclusions.

Most critics agree that the drawbacks of the dissimilarity principle can be counteracted by using it alongside a number of other criteria. Among these, the criterion of **multiple attestation**, largely ignored in the new quest, has gained the most in importance. Some scholars - especially J. D. Crossan - consider it the most objective criterion that should be given pride of place.⁵⁰ The problem is that it is heavily dependent on a previous choice of relevant sources that determines the scope of the criterion itself. Also, multiple attestation and the criterion of dissimilarity are in a "tug-of-war" with each other: "they pull the same unit in opposite directions".⁵¹ Furthermore, it is not the fact of *multiple* attestation that is the best indicator of authenticity, rather, it is attestation by *two* independent sources. It shows that the given piece of tradition was not created by either of the sources, but

also, that "Christians found it far less useful than many other parts of the Jesus tradition".⁵² Still, multiple attestation can be useful in ascertaining the authentic *motifs* of the ministry of Jesus, and so it can be employed more extensively in studies that do not concentrate on isolated sayings but are more interested in the broader picture.

In general, there is agreement - although by no means shared by all the participants of the third quest, for example - about the need to use several criteria together and the need to use them as general guides or checks upon the imagination rather than as rigorous rules. Also, there is a growing recognition of the importance of "illuminating and amplifying" the criteria of authenticity by an examination of the whole life world of Jesus⁵³, not merely individual pieces of the tradition attributed to him. There is one circumstance, however, against which even the most careful use of a combination of criteria is powerless: the possibility of the introduction of new material into the Jesus tradition at a very early stage, before the time the earliest sources can be dated to. As an example, Dale C. Allison constructs the imaginary case of the Jerusalem prophetess Faustina, who "introduced the apocalyptic Son of Man sayings into early Christianity".⁵⁴ Multiple attestation cannot differentiate her sayings from Jesus', since they entered the Jesus tradition at the beginning. According to the criterion of dissimilarity, Faustina's sayings would fare rather well: in contrast to non-Christian Jewish tradition, they use "Son of Man" in a titular fashion, yet this titular usage "never grew beyond the Jesus tradition".⁵⁵ The criterion of embarrassment would authenticate these sayings, since surely, "early Christians did not formulate for Jesus false prophecies"⁵⁶, such as the one in Matt 10:23. The difficulty is, however, that "Faustina's comforting prediction of imminent salvation became problematic only later, long after it had established itself in the tradition as an authentic word of Jesus".⁵⁷ The criterion of consistency or coherence

would not catch Faustina out either: "not only had she made Jesus' style her own, but she had meditated profoundly upon the content of his speech".⁵⁸

Faustina, however, is no more than a salutary reminder of the hypothetical nature of all reconstructions and the relative lack of transparency of the earliest tradition.

2. 4. The Use of Criteria in the Jesus Seminar

According to the manifesto of the Jesus Seminar, the fellows commit themselves to "the acceptance and use of established standards and criteria"⁵⁹. Their primary aim has been to compile a raw list of authentic sayings of Jesus, "to inquire simply, rigorously after the authentic voice of Jesus, after what he really said"⁶⁰, and in this enterprise they strive to live up to the standards of critical scholarship, according to which a critical scholar is "one whose conclusions are determined, not by prior religious convictions, but by the evidence"⁶¹.

In keeping with these objectives, each of the so-called "Red Letter" publications of the Seminar contains an exhaustive list of premises on which the reconstruction of Jesus' teaching is based. These "rules of evidence" range from generally accepted and quite uncontroversial ones (e.g. "Jesus' sayings and parables surprise and shock"⁶²) to much more partisan statements (e.g. Jesus did not initiate dialogues and debates, because he was a sage, and "the sage is laconic, slow to speech, a person of few words"⁶³).

Some of the premises represent judgments about the characteristic speech forms Jesus used as a teacher of "wit and wisdom", characteristics "distilled from an enormous amount of research"⁶⁴. These are classified as substantive criteria,

and are generally concerned with the stylistic characteristics of Jesus' speech (he said things that were short, provocative, memorable, did not speak in long monologues, his sayings and parables often contain the reversal of roles and expectations), but slightly modified versions of the traditional criteria are also included (e.g. "against the grain": Jesus' sayings and parables cut against the social and religious grain, while the early church tended to domesticate the tradition⁶⁵).

The use of criteria is inseparable from judgments about the nature of the sources. Here the Jesus Seminar's strong views concerning the oral tradition are decisive. Following radical form criticism, the fellows attribute considerable creativity to the transmitters of the tradition, not only in freely rephrasing the material but also inventing substantial portions of it: "This is the way of oral tradition: it indulges in free quotation, it invents in the name of the patron as a way of honoring him or her..."⁶⁶ Based on a largely preconceived notion of what Jesus was like, the Seminar considers as church creation all the stories where Jesus engages in controversy; another "tell-tale sign" of invention is when Jesus is represented as quoting Scripture; the miracle stories, because they conform to a common Hellenistic pattern, are ignored. In many of these judgements, the Seminar seems to adhere to form critical views which are largely outdated. For example, it is widely held today that the form of a narrative in the gospels does not provide decisive clues as to its historicity, especially in the case of the miracle tradition, which had no option but to use the form that was universally employed in the contemporary culture.⁶⁷

As far as the "layering" of the sources is concerned, the Seminar has equally strong views, especially with respect to the stratification of Q. It contains at least two, but probably three layers; the first is composed of wisdom materials, the second contains an "apocalyptic overlay" and the third some introductory material about John the Baptist.⁶⁸ This layering is very important, because each of the layers

were used in its own community; moreover, Q₁ provides the best chances of getting back to the original teaching of Jesus. Here it should be noted that the Seminar relies heavily on another old dogma that was not even held by all form critics, namely, that the age of a particular source is the best indicator of the originality of the material contained within it. "Q₁, the initial literary stratum, is more likely to be pertinent to an historical description of Jesus than those found at later levels."⁶⁹ This then enables "Q₁ scholars" to paint a picture of Jesus as an antisocial vagabond, "an imp, in Socrates' terms a social gadfly, an irritant on the skin of conventional mores and values, a marginal figure".⁷⁰ They also rely on the earlier layer of Secret Mark⁷¹ and the Gospel of Thomas.

The principles that are invoked to explain the Seminar's use of sources, namely that "canonical boundaries are irrelevant in the critical assesment of the various sources of information about Jesus"⁷², and that "critical scholars are not inclined to give special weight to the canonical gospels" are eminently reasonable in themselves, but in the Seminar's actual proceedings, bias towards the canonical gospels has been replaced by an equal bias towards the extra-canonical material. For example, they explain their preference for Q₁ and Thomas by stating that "since two extracanonical gospels, Q and Thomas are our earliest independent sources, scholars accord them the prominent place they deserve by virtue of their independence and their age."⁷³ (The fact that they regard Q as an independent extracanonical gospel is not likely to represent a consensus view of scholarship the fellows allude to so often.) This distorted view of the sources leads to the situation where there is only one saying in the whole of the Gospel of Mark that is considered authentic by the Seminar.⁷⁴

In addition to the rules governing oral transmission and the criteria for evaluating the sources, there are some general principles that the Seminar finds

important in the reconstruction of Jesus' teaching. It is here that, as far as I can see, the most sensible and useful rules can be found. These concern the final shape of the reconstructed picture of Jesus. An example is "beware of the profile of Jesus that accounts for all the data".⁷⁵ It makes good historical sense to expect that there will be some loose ends in the final product of the reconstruction. Another useful rule is the statement that "history has a way of eluding those who attempt to reduce persons and events to clear categories and exhaustive theories".⁷⁶ As so often happens, however, the Seminar's own truncated version of Jesus as a subversive counter-cultural sage does not live up to this principle, being the result of a considerable reduction of both the size of authentic material and the options open to Jesus as a historical figure. Another important principle is "beware of a congenial Jesus".⁷⁷ Here the Seminar warns against creating a portrait of Jesus which conforms to the theological bias of the author. Yet here again, without presuming to know the minds of the members of the Seminar, I suspect that most of them would find the picture of Jesus that emerges from their reconstruction quite congenial.

Finally, the Seminar introduces an argument that can be regarded as an interpretative criterion. In defence of their non-apocalyptic Jesus, they argue that this picture has greater hermeneutical potential than its alternatives. They suggest that a non-apocalyptic Jesus is the best explanation for the two contrary positions found in the gospel texts: the expectation of the imminent return of the Son of Man and the conviction that the kingdom of God was already present in the words and deeds of Jesus. "Of the two, the first is most likely to be the popular, everyday expectation to which the Christian community immediately reverted once Jesus' unusual notion died away with his words. Jesus' view that God's rule was arriving without being noticed was too subtle for the average believer to retain."⁷⁸ Arguably, however, the Seminar's non-eschatological Jesus is guaranteed by the excessive

reliance on the criterion of dissimilarity. Although apocalyptic materials can be found in almost all the early traditions, they are all eliminated by the criterion, since they are considered too compatible with the thoroughly eschatological stance of the early church.⁷⁹ Also, the employment of this criterion by the Seminar exhibits a curious double standard: "in defining distinctiveness scholars do not normally think to include the main emphases of various Hellenistic religions and philosophies. Hence, *a priori* we are faced with a situation where the methodology makes it far more "reasonable" to reconstruct a "historical Jesus" who is much more at home within Cynic or Stoic Hellenism than within first century Judaism."⁸⁰

As far as the traditionally used criteria are concerned, despite the lengthy discussion of methodological issues in the Red Letter editions, the Seminar does not discuss how these should be used in conjunction with each other and what weight should be given to the individual criteria.⁸¹ As a rule, an overuse of the criterion of dissimilarity characterises the work of the Seminar, consequently, a high percentage (82%) of the synoptic material is regarded as suspect because it is considered to be too Jewish or too Christian.⁸² In general, the Seminar's use of the criteria of authenticity, including the relative neglect of the criterion of multiple attestation (a notable exception here is J. D. Crossan) is reminiscent of the post-Bultmannian new quest. So is the negative bias concerning the reliability of the canonical gospel material, which is invariably "guilty until proven innocent". Two other characteristics of the Seminar's treatment of the Jesus-tradition are very similar to Bultmann's exegetical principles. One is a heavy reliance on the alleged tendencies of the oral tradition, which are very rarely taken for granted today, especially since E. P. Sanders' *Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*. The other is the use the Seminar makes of extra-canonical material. Craig Evans draws a parallel between the way Bultmann tried to explain the origin of Pauline and Johannine

Christology by appealing to fifth-century Mandaean sources which were themselves full of allusions to the New Testament and the Seminar's preference for third- and fourth-century Coptic sources that are also full of allusions to the New Testament.⁸³

The Seminar has also been rightly criticised for presenting as premises what are in fact conclusions.⁸⁴ Many of their "rules of evidence" are in fact based on an *a priori* decision about what Jesus was like. In fact, a Seminar member, Burton Mack, admitted that the determinative factor in the voting seemed to be the scholars' preunderstandings of Jesus' story: "As I read what happened in the voting, our understandings of the contexts made the difference....we have no common categories for actually making sense of things even among ourselves."⁸⁵ To a certain extent it is true of all reconstructions, yet presenting this preconceived picture as the ground rules for assembling the "raw list" of a database for reconstruction is misleading. The problem is not the Seminar's desire to establish clear-cut criteria - it is always important to clarify the methodological principles used in a reconstruction - the real problem is the way these criteria are used or ignored for the sake of a predetermined stance. The scepticism of the Seminar concerning the reliability of the gospel tradition is even more apparent in *The Acts of Jesus*, where all the incidents that contain a scriptural allusion are interpreted as having been created to fulfill a scriptural prophecy.⁸⁶

2.5. Modifications and Developments

The radical scepticism of form criticism concerning the reliability of the gospel tradition has provoked differing reactions among scholars. For some, the answer has been a refusal to ask the question about the historicity of the material

and the denial of the propriety and usefulness of the historical critical method in the study of Christian origins. In consequence, ahistorical methods, such as literary approaches or rhetorical criticism have proliferated in gospel studies.

For historical Jesus research, however, these options are not available, since its raw material itself is to be reconstructed from the sources, however much it tries to respect the unity and individuality of the texts. If the methodology created and used by the earlier quests proves unsatisfactory, then new historical methods need to be worked out that can either supplement or replace the earlier criteria. In different ways and to differing degrees, this rethinking of the historical method has been paramount for the scholars of the third quest, although not all of them find the use of the criteria of authenticity indispensable for the historical project. All third questers are firmly committed to the historical mode of inquiry, but there is a lot of disagreement over the actual historical strategies to be used. Most scholars are more interested in placing Jesus into a plausible historical context than in trying to ascertain the authenticity or inauthenticity of individual passages. For some, this shift has been prompted by the realisation that the radical scepticism of some new questers was unfounded, and a greater optimism concerning the reliability of the gospel tradition was possible. For others the main reason is the recognition that "on more subtle questions the evidence is both insufficient and controversial⁸⁷ to serve as a basis for reconstruction. Thus attention has turned towards the possibilities of finding larger and more comprehensive approaches. Most of the criteria proposed in the third quest are designed to establish this larger framework.

Historical Constraints (A. E. Harvey)

The notion of historical constraints is based on the observation that individuals wishing to influence others are not totally free to choose their own style

of action, but rather are subject to constraints their culture imposes on them. Truly creative people can, of course, bend these constraints to their purpose, but if they want to communicate at all, they must conform to them to a certain extent. The wealth of detail provided by archaeology increased our knowledge of Jesus' environment, so the bare biographical statements that can be gleaned from the sources take on considerable significance when we place them in this context. There was only a small number of options open to a teacher in Jesus' time, so taking account of these options may contribute to his profile. The usual criteria of authenticity can only be used to help us determine which of the options were actually adopted by Jesus.⁸⁸ The criterion of historical constraints, since it is eminently sensible, has been taken up by other scholars as well. (e.g. John Riches, Marcus Borg, N. T. Wright). Opinions vary greatly, however, concerning the degree of creative freedom Jesus had to transcend these boundaries. John Riches warns that a religious personality should not be seen as wholly constrained by the beliefs of his time. For example, Jesus was able to delete some of the associations connected with the tensive symbol of the kingdom of God and add new ones (see chapter 4).⁸⁹

Hermeneutical Potential (J.D. Crossan)

Crossan calls this the "criterion of adequacy": that is original which best explains the multiplicity engendered by the tradition.⁹⁰ He tries to imagine words and deeds that could have been "plausibly and persuasively, sincerely and honestly" interpreted in two different directions. For example, if Jesus' words can be invoked both for and against legal observance, then he could not have been one to observe strict, even Pharisaic legal norms, but neither could he have been "lax, liberal, humanistic or anarchic".⁹¹ Crossan's working hypothesis is that "Jesus proclaimed the unmediated presence of God to each and every individual and thus the

concomitant unmediated presence of each individual to every other individual....Such a proclamation was radically simple, profoundly paradoxical, religiously provocative and politically explosive."⁹² The hermeneutical potential of this hypothesis is, for Crossan, increased by the fact that it reaches back to the "aniconicity of Israel's God, with the perennial insistence that no form of mediation encapsulated the divine presence".⁹³ It also had links to the future, in that the "proclamation of divine immediacy undercut the very distinction of Jew and Gentile".⁹⁴ The paradoxicality of this core message explains why different hearers understood it differently. Gal 3:28, for example, is a magnificent expression of this immediacy, while Col 3:11 shows how it could be interpreted in a much more limited and restricted way.

A serious limitation of this criterion is the complicated nature of the tradition. Not all aspects of its multiplicity can be satisfactorily explained by Crossan's working hypothesis. For example, it is not clear how the diversity of eschatological ideas can all be derived from it. It might also be the case, as J. P. Meier warns, that the paucity of the data does not allow the construction of such an overarching theory. For the examples Crossan mentions, however, the hypothesis does provide an elegant solution.

Klausner's Test (E. P. Sanders)

This criterion is also concerned with what a good hypothesis could and should look like. It should "situate Jesus believably in Judaism and yet explain why the movement initiated by him eventually broke with Judaism". It is no longer possible to separate Jesus from his Jewish environment, yet a connection should be made between him and his followers. Sanders admits that there is nothing logically impossible about the supposition of certain scholars that Christianity came into being solely as a result of the resurrection; he argues, however, for a continuity between

the eschatology and the intentions of Jesus and the early church.⁹⁵

The Criterion of Rejection and Execution (J. P. Meier)

This criterion has been formulated by J. P. Meier. He insists that we must be able to say what historical words and deeds of Jesus can explain his trial and crucifixion as king of the Jews. "[a] tweedy poetaster who spent his time spinning out parables and Japanese koans, a literary aesthete who toyed with 1st-century deconstructionism, or a bland Jesus who simply told people to look at the lilies of the field - such a Jesus would threaten no one...A Jesus whose words and deeds would not alienate people, especially powerful people, is not the historical Jesus."⁹⁶ The same criterion is voiced by N. T. Wright when he argues that a good hypothesis should present Jesus as "a comprehensible, but crucifiable 1st-century Jew".⁹⁷ E. P. Sanders in *Jesus and Judaism* also looks for a connecting link "between Jesus' own view of his mission and the kingdom to his death and then to the church".⁹⁸

This connection has, however, been questioned. Rudolf Bultmann, for example, suggested that Jesus' execution as a political criminal "can scarcely be understood as an inherent and necessary consequence of his activity; rather, it took place because his activity was misconstrued as political activity. In that case it would have been- historically speaking - a meaningless fate."⁹⁹ Present-day exponents of the idea that the life of Jesus bears no intrinsic relation to his death include Burton Mack, who argues that Jesus' death was basically an accident.¹⁰⁰ The most serious objection that has been aimed at this criterion is that it is in fact a theological postulate disguised as historical method.¹⁰¹ As history knows "too many examples of meaningless deaths", to insist on using Jesus' death to understand his life is to mix theological and historical categories inexcusably.¹⁰² This criticism, however, is based

on a mistaken understanding of historical research. While the possibility of a meaningless death cannot be excluded, it is well within the reach of historiography to attempt to establish a causal link between the life and death of a historical person. It is sufficient to demonstrate that such a construal is more probable and thus "more satisfying historically"¹⁰³ than the alternative. Moreover, in the case of Jesus' story the decisive issue is not an abstract weighing of the possibilities but the attempt to make sense of the possible clues pointing to this causal connection in the gospel texts themselves.

The Criterion of Historical Plausibility (Gerd Theissen)

Theissen develops this criterion in order to correct the one-sidedness of the criterion of dissimilarity while retaining its basic insight about the distinctiveness of the Jesus tradition. This criterion attempts to reckon with Jesus' influence on early Christianity while maintaining his involvement in a Jewish context. "Whatever helps to explain the influence of Jesus and at the same time can only have come into being in a Jewish context is historical in the sources."¹⁰⁴ The criterion of historical plausibility is broken down into four components that complement each other. The historical effects of the life of Jesus can be gleaned from the sources that attest to it, especially when independent sources correspond and elements within these sources go against the tendency. "Coherence and opposition to the tendency are complementary criteria for the plausibility of historical influence."¹⁰⁵ The criterion of coherence is not applied in connection to the criterion of difference, rather, it is to be used independently, for any elements that can be interpreted coherently in independent traditions. Multiple attestation of "substantial motifs and subjects in independent traditions..... can be explained in particular as the effect of the historical Jesus on the sources, if they cannot be explained from known tendencies of primitive

Christianity, or are especially 'recalcitrant'.¹⁰⁶ The apparent contradiction caused by the fact that the criterion of coherence is used together with the criterion of "resistance to tradition" is resolved by the use of another criterion: "what can be interpreted as plausible in the context also goes back to the historical Jesus".¹⁰⁷ This 'context plausibility' is further broken down into the complementary indices of contextual correspondence and contextual individuality. "Traditions of Jesus have a plausible historical context when they fit into the Jewish context of the activity of Jesus and are recognisable as individual phenomena within this context."¹⁰⁸ What this criterion requires is in a sense the opposite of the requirements of the criterion of dissimilarity: "what cannot be derived from the Judaism of the time is probably not historical".¹⁰⁹ This does not mean, however, that Jesus could not have come into conflict with his environment: contextual *individuality* means the "possibility of distinguishing him in a common context".¹¹⁰

Theissen's composite criterion of historical plausibility demonstrates the need to use the criteria of authenticity in concert, so that, optimally, they mutually strengthen each other, while their weaknesses cancel each other out. This formulation is reminiscent of N. T. Wright's criterion of "double dissimilarity and double similarity" to be discussed in the next chapter.

2.6. Conclusion

All of the criteria mentioned above are designed to clarify the larger context into which the individual pieces of the Jesus tradition can be fitted. A very strong argument in favour of this approach is the form critical tenet that many of the original settings of the sayings are lost, and their meaning cannot be ascertained

without a context. The whole of the third quest might be said to be "a quest for context"¹¹¹. With the possible exception of J. P. Meier all the major participants in the quest agree that "the historical framework must be clarified and then used as a primary criterion for determining what sayings and episodes ought to be considered the stronger candidates"¹¹² for being part of the authentic tradition.

While the fact that a historical framework is essential for the understanding of the gospel material cannot be doubted, some aspects of this new approach are problematic. On the one hand, the third quest is far from unified in its estimation of the historical circumstances of Jesus' life. While the "Jewishness" of Jesus is generally acknowledged, for example, there is no agreement as to precisely how and to what extent Jesus might have disagreed with or differed from his contemporaries. Similarly, opinions diverge with respect to the pervasiveness of Hellenistic influence in 1st-century rural Galilee. Another serious problem is that very often the decisive criterion in judging a reconstruction is the coherence, the explanatory power of the thesis itself.¹¹³ This attitude comes dangerously close to what Ben F. Meyer calls "the strategy of the fearless detective".¹¹⁴ If the radical form critics erred on the side of caution (they thought that there were not enough knowns to support hypotheses)¹¹⁵, then some third quest hypotheses are in danger of lacking the control of verification by the data. "The aim of criticism is not to achieve coherence of supposition but to generate knowns"¹¹⁶, Meyer claims.

Eugene M. Boring suggests that there are three basic stages of the historical reconstruction of the story of Jesus: an analytic phase, where the data base is recovered by separating the 'authentic' material from the 'inauthentic' and yielding the 'excavated Jesus'; a descriptive phase where the recovered data are put together in the reconstruction of the most plausible picture of Jesus as he really was (the 'reconstructed Jesus'); and the final, normative phase where the significance of

the 'interpreted Jesus' for later history is portrayed.¹¹⁷ The real advances of the third quest have obviously been made on the second level, where new criteria have been proposed and used. Exclusive concentration on this intermediate stage, however, is defective for at least two reasons. Boring warns that level 3 can often be collapsed into level 2, when the reconstructed Jesus becomes the normative Jesus, as in the work of Burton Mack and J. D. Crossan.¹¹⁸ For the theme of this chapter, the second danger is even more significant: the historical reconstruction can also disregard the need for adequate data control, and level 1 becomes submerged in level 2. It is at this point where the traditional criteria of historicity should play a role in the verification of hypotheses, however much this role is subordinated to the establishment of the historical context. As Ben F. Meyer makes clear, the real problem with the Enlightenment views of the history of Jesus was not the development of the historical method in the study of the gospel tradition, but rather the reductionist philosophy that governed the use of the method.¹¹⁹ The question is whether and to what extent the method can be separated from the philosophical presuppositions. As the work of J. P. Meier suggests, to a certain extent this separation is possible.



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- 1 Harvey K. McArthur: "The Burden of Proof in Historical Jesus Research" *Expository Times* 82, 1971, p. 119. quoted in Dale C. Allison: *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* Fortress, Augsburg, 1998 p. 76.
- 2 *ibid.* p. 77.
- 3 Riches, *A Century of New Testament Study* p. 25.
- 4 Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1980 p. 49. quotes Bultmann disclaiming any hard and fast criteria.
- 5 *ibid.* p. 52.
- 6 Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* ET Scribner's, New York, 1958 p. 209.
- 7 Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* p. 49. quoting Bultmann.
- 8 Bultmann, *ibid.* p. 210.
- 9 Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* Harper&Row, New York, 1968 p.125.
- 10 *ibid.* p. 205.
- 11 Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" in: *Essays on New Testament Themes* SBT41 London and Nashville, 1964 p. 17.
- 12 *ibid.* p. 25.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 *ibid.* p. 32.
- 15 Käsemann criticizes both Bultmann's and Jeremias' position in "Blind Alleys in the Jesus of History Controversy" in: *New Testament Questions of Today* Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1969 pp. 23-65.
- 16 Käsemann: "The Problem..." p. 33.
- 17 Barry W. Henaut: "Is the 'Historical Jesus' a Christological Construct?" in: W.E. Arnal/M. Desjardins ed. : *Whose Historical Jesus?* Studies in Christianity and Judaism 7, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997, p. 149.
- 18 Käsemann, "The Problem..." p. 34.
- 19 *ibid.* p. 35.
- 20 *ibid.* p. 37.
- 21 *ibid.* p. 46.
- 22 Henaut, p. 251.
- 23 *ibid.* Henaut quotes E. P. Sanders' evaluation of these sayings: "In a Jewish environment, observance of the Sabbath and the consumption of kosher food are largely matters of routine. That food and Sabbath were issues in the Gentile churches is shown by the letters of Paul, where they are the only two items other than circumcision that require special treatment (Gal. 2:11-14; 4:10; Rom. 14:16). Thus it is very probable that the issues of food and Sabbath are so prominent in the Gospels because of the importance which they assumed in the church. That is not to say, of course, that it can be proved that Jesus never debated such issues. This is another negative that cannot be proved. But that they *defined* his relationship to his contemporaries is most unlikely." *Jesus and Judaism* p. 264.
- 24 Henaut, p. 252.

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- 25 Norman Perrin: *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* SCM, London 1967, p. 37.
- 26 *ibid.* p. 39.
- 27 *ibid.* p. 43.
- 28 *ibid.* p. 46.
- 29 Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* Harper & Row, New York, 1960, p. 21.
- 30 *ibid.* p. 26.
- 31 Oscar Cullmann, "Out of Season Remarks on the "Historical Jesus" of the Bultmann School" in: Harvey K. McArthur ed.: *In Search of the Historical Jesus* SPCK, London, 1970, p. 269.
- 32 James D. G. Dunn: "Prophetic 'I'-sayings and the Jesus Tradition: The Importance of Testing Prophetic Utterances Within Early Christianity" *NTS* 24, 1977-78, pp. 175-198.
- 33 Gerald Downing: *The Church and Jesus: A Study in History, Philosophy and Theology* SCM, London, 1968 p. 121.
- 34 Robert H. Stein: "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity" in: *Gospel Perspectives*. Vol.1 ed. R. France and D. Wenham JSOT, Sheffield, 1980, pp. 226-227.
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- 40 Lloyd Gaston "The Uniqueness of Jesus as a Methodological Problem" in: ed.: Bradley H. McLean: *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity* JSOT Sheffield, 1993, p. 275.
- 41 John G. Gager "The Gospels and Jesus: Some Doubts about Method" *Journal of Religion* 54, 1974, p. 257.
- 42 Meyer : *Aims...* p. 86.
- 43 Stein p. 244.
- 44 Mealand "The Dissimilarity Test" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31, 1978, p. 43.
- 45 Gager p. 258.
- 46 *ibid.* p. 43.
- 47 Allison p. 6.
- 48 *ibid.* p. 49. (It must be noted, however, that in this case the criterion is used negatively, which only shows that even its negative use cannot be excluded when there are good reasons for it.)
- 49 *ibid.* p. 48.
- 50 McArthur "The Burden..." p. 118.
- 51 Allison p. 20.
- 52 *ibid.* p. 24.

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- 53 Eugene M. Boring "The Historical-critical Method's Criteria of Authenticity" *Semeia* 44, 1988, p. 11.
- 54 Allison p. 7.
- 55 *ibid.* p. 9.
- 56 *ibid.*
- 57 *ibid.*
- 58 *ibid.* p. 10.
- 59 The Jesus Seminar: *The Parables of Jesus* Red Letter Edition Sonoma, California, 1988, p. 93.
- 60 *ibid.* p. XII.
- 61 *ibid.* p. X.
- 62 The Jesus Seminar: *The Gospel of Mark* Red Letter Edition Sonoma, Calif. 1991, p. 32.
- 63 *ibid.* p. 34.
- 64 *ibid.* p. 35.
- 65 *ibid.* p. 32.
- 66 *ibid.* p. 38.
- 67 cf. Meier's treatment of the miracle tradition
- 68 Red Letter Mark, p. 13.
- 69 Leif E. Vaage: "Q1 and the Historical Jesus" in *Foundations and Facets Forum* 5, 1989 p. 59-76.
- 70 *ibid.* p. 175.
- 71 see the discussion on Crossan
- 72 Red Letter Mark p. 51.
- 73 *ibid.* p. 50.
- 74 Mark 12:17
- 75 Red Letter Mark p. 51.
- 76 *ibid.* p. 51.
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- 82 Craig A. Evans: *Jesus and his Contemporaries* Leiden, Brill 1995, p. 38.
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- 93 *ibid.*
- 94 *ibid.*
- 95 Sanders: *Jesus and Judaism* p. 18.
- 96 J. P. Meier: *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* Vol 1. Doubleday, New York, p. 177.
- 97 Wright: *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 86.
- 98 Sanders: *Jesus and Judaism* p. 21.
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- 101 Gaston p. 276.
- 102 *ibid.*
- 103 Sanders: *Jesus and Judaism* p. 22.
- 104 Gerd Theissen/Annette Merz: *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1998 p. 116.
- 105 *ibid.*
- 106 *ibid.* p. 117.
- 107 *ibid.*
- 108 *ibid.*
- 109 *ibid.* p. 118.
- 110 *ibid.*
- 111 B. Chilton/C. A. Evans: *Jesus in Context* Leiden, Brill 1997, p. 1.
- 112 Evans : *Jesus and his Contemporaries* p.14.

113 e.g. Borg in *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* Edwin Mellen Press, New York, .p. 24.: the comprehensiveness of a reconstruction is the final test of both context and method

114 Meyer *Aim...s* p. 43.

115 *ibid.* p. 91.

116 *ibid.* p. 82.

117 Eugene M. Boring: "The Third Quest and Apostolic Faith" in: *Interpretation* 50, 1996, p. 348.

118 *ibid.* p. 346.

119 Meyer *Aims...* p. 43.

Chapter 3.

Criteria of Evaluation

3. 1. Introduction

In Chapters 1 and 2 I have suggested a number of criteria by which third quest contributions might be evaluated. These rules must be divided into three distinct categories: one that takes into account the general shape of the hypothesis, its method of interpretation and argumentation; another for testing the logic of historical reasoning, including special criteria applicable to the historical reconstruction of Jesus' ministry; and a third one that examines the treatment of the sources and the procedure of gathering the data. This separation is necessitated by the fact that, although these levels are interrelated in the reconstructions, yet they are not interchangeable: each of them has its specific character and mode of inquiry. Also, as the postmodern critique of history writing has shown, there is no natural development from one level to the next; in Lyotard's phrase, the levels of data control and interpretation involve different "phrase regimes" and the movement between them invariably takes an imaginative jump.

The criteria of evaluation will necessarily be impressionistic to a certain extent. They cannot claim 'scientific' status; they function as guidelines rather than strict rules.

3.2. General Criteria

3.2.1. Hypotheses whose authors openly admit their situatedness and foreground their interests and account for the significance they attach to the reconstruction of the historical Jesus are more satisfying than those whose authors do not. (C.f. D. H. Fisher's criterion: "The criteria of factual significance must be made explicit: the only alternative is covert commitments."¹)

Only a few of the third quest scholars have undertaken to clarify their bias, most of them follow the "modernist" practice of assuming a disinterested stance. Sanders' or Crossan's presuppositions can only be gleaned indirectly from their arguments, whereas Meier disguises his in the list detailing the uses of historical Jesus research. In contrast, Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright are refreshingly open about the contemporary relevance of their scholarly work.² Wright often argues for a model where "rigorous history" and "rigorous theology" belong together, while Borg expresses the presuppositions and the purpose of his work in terms of providing a corrective to both the popular and the scholarly image of Jesus. He describes the popular image as "a divine or semidivine figure whose purpose was to die for the sins of the world"³ and argues that this image creates a fideistic understanding of Christianity⁴. In contrast, the scholarly consensus about the image of Jesus as an eschatological prophet results in a strange silence about what Jesus was like as a historical figure.⁵ Borg does not shy away from assessing Jesus' "significance for our time". He offers an image of Jesus as the "epiphany of God", who provides a model for Christian life as "life lived on the boundary of Spirit and culture, participating in both worlds".⁶ Jesus' example enables Christian communities to give a "transformationist" response - based on the dominant value of compassion

- to a culture dominated by competition and the "performance principle". In Borg's later books, there are clear connections between the conventional wisdom of the first and the twentieth century, because both worlds are based on the performance principle and the conformity principle and both are characterised by a "life of profound self-preoccupation".⁷

Within the biblical tradition, Borg discerns three "macro-stories" that also shaped the message of Jesus: the exodus story of bondage and liberation, the story of exile and return, and the priestly story of guilt, sin, sacrifice and forgiveness. He argues that the priestly story has dominated Christianity ever since becoming the official religion of Western culture, encouraging a passive, politically domesticated attitude. The story of Jesus imaged as a story of bondage and liberation or exile and return can contribute, Borg thinks, to a transformist understanding of Christian life to take the place of the fideistic and the moralistic images.⁸

Laudable though Borg's openness about his presuppositions is, his picture of the popular view of Jesus is arguably simplistic. He correctly notes a tendency in popular piety towards a docetistic understanding of Jesus, yet he fails to recognise that his Jesus, "the leader of the peace movement and the opponent of the Pharisees" is also part of the popular understanding of Jesus.⁹ (It might be, though, that Borg is merely concerned to give proper weight to the transformist picture of Jesus in order to enable Christians "to take seriously what Jesus took seriously".¹⁰ In that case his concern is similar to what Charlotte Allen identifies in the work of Q scholars:

"As for the sayings of Jesus that scholars have isolated, they may remind readers of something valuable. When many educated Europeans and Americans lost their religious faith, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they began subscribing to the notion, still current, that the main purpose of religion is its social

utility as an enforcer of morality among the poor, inspiring them (for example) to quit drinking and pull up their socks. The Gospels - or Q, if you will - have something different to say. At their core is a more radical commandment, which requires one to make a gift of everything, of one's very self. It is a commandment that only a few have followed - Russian holy men, Saint Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day - but one that remains compelling nonetheless. So it may be worthwhile that scholars in Claremont and elsewhere have pulled out the texts to serve as a distilled reminder."¹¹)

Similarly, the scholarly picture of Jesus is not so uniformly minimalistic and bleak either as Borg suggests in his description of the earlier "eschatological consensus", as the work of scholars like C. H. Dodd or Joachim Jeremias testifies - scholars who have unfairly been neglected in most recent taxonomies of the various quests.¹²

Also, Borg's search for a contemporary relevance for historical Jesus study would require a more tightly argued, less impressionistic reconstruction. "A coherence or symmetry between a historical Jesus and one's own religious, political and social programs is not necessarily a mark against the reconstruction, but one at least ought to assess with double caution such agreements as perhaps suspiciously convenient and requiring extra strong defence."¹³

Another, rare, positive example when the significance of a particular stance is made absolutely clear is Sean Freyne's admission that an eschatological portrait of Jesus is indispensable for "those who call themselves Christian": "My insistence on the eschatological nature of Jesus' career arises from my concern regarding the claims to ultimacy that Christian faith makes in terms of Jesus".¹⁴ Naturally, such an admission of interest shifts the burden of proof onto the author,

but as we have already seen, in historiography, the burden of proof is always on the scholar making a particular claim in any case.

3.2.2. Hypotheses whose authors enter into open debate with other reconstructions of the historical Jesus without employing *ad hominem* arguments are more satisfying than those whose authors do not.

Both N. T. Wright and J. P. Meier react to the opinions of other questers extensively. The lack of any engagement with the arguments of other scholars is conspicuous in Crossan's 1991 *The Historical Jesus* which he makes up for to a certain extent in the 1998 *The Birth of Christianity*. Sanders, of course, writes before the appearance of all the other third quest contributions, so he can only be faulted for his disregard of much previous scholarship.

Although the arguments occasionally become very heated, with one regrettable exception *ad hominem* argumentation is not typical in the third quest. The exception is the accusation levelled at the Hellenistic-Cynic-Q-Thomas camp or its representatives for deJudaizing Jesus, for describing him not primarily in terms of Judaism as a religion. (The overtones of this accusation are rather sinister.) For example, N. T. Wright draws a parallel between Crossan's reconstruction and A. Harnack's portrait: "It was Adolf von Harnack who offered a deJudaized Jesus with a social programme."¹⁵

3.2.3. The presence of circular arguments that are solely based on the data they intend to explain weakens the hypothesis considerably.

We saw in Chapter 2 that the form critical argument about the "Sitz-im-Leben" of the early communities based on the forms of the pericopae, which in turn were used to explain the same forms was criticised for being too (viciously) circular. In *Jesus and Judaism*, E. P. Sanders accuses proponents of a "realised eschatology" in Jesus' ministry of the same sort of circularity. He presents previous interpretations of Matt 12:28/Luke 11:20 as signifying Jesus' awareness of the presence of the Kingdom in his exorcisms as typical examples of circular reasoning. He disregards, however, a number of other Gospel passages attesting Jesus' reputation as a successful exorcist in both Mark and Q, which, together with the criteria of dissimilarity and coherence substantially strengthen the case for the authenticity of the saying.¹⁶

A better candidate for truly circular argumentation in recent historical Jesus scholarship may be the Q₁ hypothesis: The only candidates for getting into this layer are non-apocalyptic wisdom sayings. The claims about the non-apocalyptic nature of Q₁, however, are based on just these non-apocalyptic wisdom sayings in Q. (There are, however, scholars who claim that "the absence of apocalyptic material has been noted in Q material judged to be earlier on completely different grounds".¹⁷) Similarly, the conviction that Jesus was non-apocalyptic prompts the Jesus Seminar to screen out all the apocalyptic elements from the parables in the gospel tradition; then the parables thus pruned are used in the establishment of the non-apocalyptic image of Jesus.¹⁸

A suspicious degree of circularity must also be noted in the case of hypotheses where the primary criterion for the acceptance of material is its

coherence with the overall hypothesis. An example may be Dale C. Allison's criterion "The plausibility that a complex or topic originated with Jesus is increased if it illumines or is illumined by the paradigm of Jesus as eschatological prophet or known biographical information about him."¹⁹

3.2.4. Hypotheses that proceed by means of counterquestions and operate by an adversary method have less explanatory power than those that do not.

The whole of Chapter 4 (on the issue of eschatology) will be trying to show that many of the problems encountered in both the non-apocalyptic and the apocalyptic "camps" is caused by concentrating too exclusively on the attempt to refute the opposing position, instead of concentrating on the textual evidence and the available historical information about eschatological ideas and language in the first century.

Two other general criteria have been suggested, the **simplicity** and **coherence** of the overall hypothesis. I decided against including them for the following reasons: I agree with D. H. Fisher's dictum that history is primarily a problem-solving and not a storytelling discipline, and the problems in historical Jesus research are usually very complex. Consequently, solutions are seldom simple. For example, it has been suggested that in principle all of the controversy stories could be attributed to either Jesus or the early community, just as all the allusions to texts in the Hebrew Bible can go either way.²⁰ Both options would provide an essentially simple an elegant solution, but one whose historical plausibility is rather doubtful.

Similarly, decisions about what to do with the simultaneous presence of future and present kingdom-sayings or decisions about the social implications of Jesus' message are far from being simple. So far, no magic wand has appeared in the form of a simple hypothesis to do away with these problems. The internal coherence of the hypothesis is also at best an "asymptotic goal" that should not be pursued at the price of disregarding recalcitrant data.

3.3. Criteria of Historical Reasoning

3.3.1. The fallacy of *tunnel history*, "when a complex problem of development is taken apart and its components are extruded into long, thin ribbons of change" should be avoided.

This fallacy is perhaps most typical of the most notable "trajectorist" in recent historical Jesus research: J. D. Crossan. (Crossan draws heavily on the work of scholars, especially Helmut Koester, who introduced trajectory theory into American New Testament scholarship.²¹)

Within the earliest Christian communities, for example, Crossan posits the existence of a separate Little Tradition and Great Tradition in *The Historical Jesus*. The Little Tradition of Galilean peasants keeps alive Jesus' subversive message of the kingdom of Nobodies, open commensality and free healing. The Great Tradition of scribal, exegetical Christianity ritualises the meal and reintroduces hierarchy and brokerage. This dichotomy for the earliest Christian movement is questionable. Arguably, the whole of the Jesus movement was a "Little Tradition" in the first two decades. "...by and large, all of first century and most of second century Christianity was still a "Little Tradition" sorting itself out; as yet, there was no "Great

Tradition".....no established, authoritative consensus capable of asserting itself at the expense of any presumed (and oppressed) Little Tradition."²² In fact, *both* Q and the Gospel of Mark should be seen and cherished as rare documents that allow glimpses into a Little Tradition that, as a rule, was doomed to silence in the historical records. Far from legitimating ecclesial or social hierarchy, the whole of the Gospel of Mark is organised around the contrast between the illegitimate use of power and control by the political and religious authorities of Rome and Israel and the God-intended use of power in the service of others. This contrast between the way of domination and the way of service is presented as the reason for the opposition Jesus encountered on the part of the authorities. Domination, however, is presented not only as the attribute of the establishment; it is at the heart of human sin: the desire to get wealth, status and power over others infects the disciples as well and climaxes in the scene where they vie for positions of prestige in the coming kingdom. This scene is the occasion for the clearest expression of the contrast between relationships based on domination and relationships of "mutual love and responsibility"²³ (Mark 10: 42-44).

Much the same applies to another, similar distinction made by Crossan in *The Birth of Christianity* between the Life Tradition and the Death Tradition: "It is necessary, then, to distinguish two traditions in earliest Christianity, one emphasizing the sayings of Jesus and the other emphasizing the death and resurrection of Jesus....The Life Tradition and the Death Tradition could be distinguished as northern and southern traditions....They could also be distinguished as rural and urban traditions."²⁴ Here again, the idea that two streams of tradition existed in earliest Christianity that were mutually either ignorant of or uninterested in what the other had to say about Jesus, all within the territory of a small country and the time span of just two decades is not sufficiently established.

3.3.2. In a historical reconstruction, neither consensus and continuity, nor conflict and change must be presumed. Rather, a reasonable case must be established using historical data for either.

The issue of continuity vs conflict arises in two areas of historical Jesus research: the appraisal of the historical (political and social) situation in first century Palestine and the estimation of the nature and degree of religious conflict between Jesus and his contemporaries.

J. D. Crossan thinks primarily in terms of the fundamental conflict between Rome and her resisters. All the other relationships mediate and actualise this basic antagonism. Consequently, Crossan does not analyse the gospel stories of controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees over legal matters; he sidelines primarily religious conflict to concentrate on social and political ones.

Crossan makes use of a mixture of the analysis of historical documents and socio-anthropological concepts to sketch the social and political history of Palestine in the first century C.E., filling the gaps in historical information with social and cross-cultural anthropological theories. The macro-context for Crossan is not Palestinian history, rather, the fabric of Mediterranean honour-shame culture, where one's identity is exclusively defined by one's place in society and the opinion of others, and the system of patronage and clientage that governs the interrelationships in society along the axis of informal personal power. (In a perceptive analysis of Graeco-Roman examples of patronage he shows how a delicate imbalance of mutual indebtedness pervaded the whole society²⁵ and how this hierarchical structure of patronage was later mirrored in the patron-saint ideology of Catholic Christianity.) Following Richard Horsley he posits a trajectory of

escalating violence with four stages: injustice, protest and resistance, repression and revolt. As chronologically Jesus' life corresponds with the second stage, Crossan assumes that the period must have been characterised by , Crossan assumes that the period must have been characterised by protest and resistance, whether or not there is documentary evidence for it.²⁶ He surveys the history of first century unrest, stressing the tension between city and country, "literate scribes and illiterate peasants", the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition. He charts the trajectory of this hostility as far as the Jewish War which he also interprets as having a "social revolution within a political rebellion"²⁷, with special emphasis on the escalation of rural banditry in the years preceding the war. Crossan's intention is to describe the whole of the first century C.E. as a "co-ordinated and continuous insurrection against Rome"²⁸ involving protesters, prophets, bandits and Messiahs. Nevertheless, he neglects the national-political aspects of this unrest (despite the fact that most clashes with Rome were predominantly religiopolitical) and concentrates almost exclusively on its socio-economical dimensions: the destitution of the peasant class pushed below subsistence level and doubly taxed by Rome and the Temple.

Protests against the political establishment were paralleled by protests against religious authority. Crossan, following Geza Vermes, paints the portrait of the charismatic "holy men" Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa. These two stand in the separate northern prophetic tradition of Elijah and Elisha, combined "oracular political prophecy and popular individual magic" and were the northern equivalents of the Mosaic liberation traditions much too associated with the Southern Temple in Jerusalem. The tension between the religious establishment of the Temple and the "individual prophetic and charismatic magician" is evident for Crossan in the stories about Honi and Hanina, whose dangerous access to divine power was later tamed and downplayed by the rabbinic tradition.²⁹

In an important article, **E. P. Sanders** takes issue with this conflict-centered view of the first century situation in Palestine.³⁰ He argues that Hellenistic influence in Palestine was not as pervasive as it suggests. The client-kings of Rome did not build *gymnasia* or establish Greek institutions on Jewish soil. Herod Antipas was "a good and able Jewish tetrarch"³¹ who did not require his subjects to drop their distinctive ancestral customs. Roman presence was insignificant even in Judea; effective rule was in the hands of the priestly aristocracy. Pharisees only played a prominent part in times of acute crisis, as in the war, but not until then.

Neither were Palestinian peasants taxed unfairly and excessively. They were poor and hard working, but "were by no means at the point of destitution"³². True, they had to support both the Temple and the secular government, but so did all the other peasants of the Mediterranean world, most of whom had two layers of government.

Sanders' objections are a salutary reminder that the particularities of a historical situation should not be disregarded in the application of broad theories of social formation and generalisations. Of course, Sanders views history as primarily political history with the attention focused on the individual traits of rulers. It is possible that a view from below would stress the harshness and injustice of the economic situation. In this respect, the analogy Sanders uses to clarify how local and imperial government interrelated reveals his essentially elitist conception of history. He argues that Rome ruled her client kingdoms similarly to the way the Soviet Empire related to Eastern European countries that all had their local governments with the Soviets intervening only occasionally, "when unrest and civil tumult got out of hand or when a brash government felt too independent".³³ Sanders forgets, however, that the independence of these countries was absolutely illusory: the "native" leaders were useful because they could speak the language. In

all other respects, however, they were the puppets of Soviet interests. It made little difference - although it did make some difference - that, say, János Kádár was relatively more decent than Erich Honecker, the system itself was as rotten as in the Empire itself. If we stay with the analogy, how much could it have mattered that Antipas was "a good and able Jewish tetrarch"?³⁴

Sanders sees Jesus' attitude to the Mosaic law as determined by his conviction that the new age was at hand. Contrary to widespread opinion, Jesus did not "abrogate" or oppose the law, and never recommended its transgression, with the one possible exception of Matt 8:21-22 ("Leave the dead to bury their own dead."), where the urgency and importance of following Jesus seems to override the normal obligations of piety.³⁵ Elsewhere Jesus quotes the law with approval, (Matt 22:37-40), or is represented as affirming the Temple sacrifice and the purity laws (e.g. the healing of the leper in Mark 1:40-45) most of the conflict stories in Mark 2:1 - 3:6 which represent either Jesus or his followers as breaking purity, food or Sabbath laws Sanders regards as implausible and retrojecting later conflicts in the early church. For example, if Mark 7:15, where Jesus in his private teaching declares all foods clean is authentic, it becomes very difficult to understand the bitter fight over food laws in the first Christian communities reflected in Paul's letters and even Acts (Peter's vision in 10:11-14)³⁶.

In *Jesus and Judaism*, Sanders' position with respect to the antitheses in Matt 5:21-47, where Jesus is presented as calling his followers to be "more righteous than the Pharisees by the same standard" is that this Jesus is not the same person as the "historical Jesus who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners".³⁷ In view of the later conflicts in the church, neither explicitly anti-law, nor explicitly pro-law statements can be attributed to Jesus.³⁸ The only exception is the prohibition of divorce, where the intensification of the law is supported by the appeal to the order

of creation, may spring from Jesus' expectation that the end will be like the beginning.³⁹ In *The Historical Figure of Jesus* Sanders does not say that the antitheses in Matthew cannot be attributed to Jesus, he merely notes that the heightening of the law that they represent, even if it implies criticism of the law, is not an opposition to it.⁴⁰ Jesus did not say that the demands of the law were invalid, Sanders stresses, but he did on occasion imply that in his own mission "God was acting directly and immediately, bypassing the agreed, biblically sanctioned ordinances".⁴¹ That is, while Jesus did not oppose the law, he did view it as not final and not adequate in the new age God was about to establish (cf. his justification of the fact that his disciples do not fast in Mark 2:18-22 which Sanders apparently accepts as authentic, although it may well reflect a later conflict.)

Sanders finds the only source of tension between Jesus and the Pharisees in the fact that he claimed to be able to say whom God would include in the Kingdom, and this group included the sinners. Sanders maintains that the sinners Jesus calls are not in fact the common people who are looked down on by the "narrow, bigoted but dominant Pharisees" because of their ritual impurity, but rather the "wicked", who deliberately transgress the law. The real offense of Jesus' message is not his opposition to some "trivial, externalistic" purity laws, but rather his acceptance of the wicked without first requiring repentance and restitution. This offence was increased by his claim that these sinners (tax collectors and prostitutes) would enter the kingdom before the righteous (Matt 21:31).⁴² (In this context Sanders argues passionately against various misrepresentations on the part of Christian scholars of the nature of the conflict between Jesus and normative Judaism.⁴³ For example, the meaning of Jesus' action in the Temple has been represented as a protest against the sacrificial system itself, and in favour of a purer inward worship; the prediction of the destruction of the Temple has been seen as a

metaphor for the destruction of the old religion; Jesus' acceptance of sinners has been understood as meaning that "even the most desolate and lost human souls could make peace with God if they realised that they had no merit but must accept grace as a gift".⁴⁴ He protests against the false picture of the Pharisees as narrow-minded and merit-seeking legalists, excluding the common people on the basis of sectarian purity laws, opposed to grace and love. He also stresses that before 70 the Pharisees did not control Judaism and had much less influence than the priesthood. It not only falsifies Judaism, but also trivialises Jesus, Sanders says, to present him as a "champion of plain folk against an intolerable bunch of bigots."⁴⁵ Jesus' acceptance of the wicked must be seen from the perspective of eschatology. The focus is not on repentance but on God's action, who in the last days is ready to accept the sinners as they are, without requiring the customary process of restitution. Jesus' table fellowship with outsiders must also be understood as an eschatological sign; these meals look forward to the messianic banquet, where "many would come from east and west" and where the reversal of values indicated by the presence of the sinners will come to fulfilment (Matt 8:11). Sanders suggests that Jesus' emphasis on calling the outcasts can also be related to the activity of John the Baptist: those first called (by John) did not come, so now others, the outcasts were invited to the banquet (Matt 22:1-10, Luke 14: 15-24)⁴⁶

It is this desire to avoid any distorting theological bias that motivates Sanders' insistence on an exclusively historical approach. His work, of course, is not free from hermeneutical concern either, it is characterised by what may be called a "hermeneutics of compensation"⁴⁷, an endeavour to correct the anti-Judaism of some Christian scholars. It has been argued, however, that in his attempt to defend Judaism Sanders himself tacitly accepts the dichotomy of law and grace, presenting

Rabbinism as a religion of grace, thus making it into "a pale reflection of Protestant Christianity".⁴⁸

Several of Sanders' critics point out that we should allow for a more serious conflict between Jesus and some of his contemporaries - and not just the priests - than Sanders would have us believe. In this respect, both Sanders' equation of the term "sinners" with the really wicked and his treatment of the gospels' portrait of the Pharisees may be questioned.

Sanders presents the Pharisees as a group of lay experts of the law, distinct from the small sect of the "haverim" centered on table fellowship, and claims that the Pharisees had no substantial quarrel with Jesus. This picture has been criticised for being too vague, leaving the Pharisees in a sociological limbo with no identifiable power base or programme⁴⁹ as well as for ignoring such important evidence as that of Paul, a self-confessed Pharisee whose zeal led him to persecute followers of Jesus.⁵⁰ Moreover, Sanders' presentation of the gospel portrait of the Pharisees relies heavily on caricature, "as though the case for seeing genuine tension between Jesus and Pharisaic circles depended on the unrealistic picture of Pharisaic snoopers skulking behind sheaves of corn to spy out infractions of the law".⁵¹ It is undeniable, in my view, that the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees as presented in the gospels is coloured and amplified by later antagonisms between Christian groups and representatives of Judaism. The question, however, is whether "opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees as portrayed in the Gospels is *all* a retrojection of later controversies, without historical foundation within the ministry of Jesus?" (italics mine).⁵² The fact that a high percentage of rabbinic material attributed to pre-70 tradition is concerned with table fellowship laws indicates that "the purity of the meal table was an important concern among many of the Pharisees of Jesus' time".⁵³ Within the synoptic tradition, controversy stories where the issue is, for example, a

dispute over *how* the sabbath should be observed and not yet *whether* it should be observed probably contain reminiscences from Jesus' life.⁵⁴ "A Jesus who was as loyal to the covenant but who had different ideas of what covenant loyalty involved would almost certainly pose a threat to Pharisaic self-understanding and identity."⁵⁵

As far as identifying the sinners with the wicked is concerned, Sanders' use of the term "sinner" implies a wilful renunciation of the Torah, a sinfulness that takes the person outside the covenant, and not mere impurity that can be dealt with within the framework of the sacrificial system. It is not at all certain, however, that such a clear-cut distinction was made, or that the term "wicked" "...consistently carries the quasi-technical sense which it must bear for Sanders' argument to work".⁵⁶ There is ample evidence in contemporary literature that opposing factions often called their adversaries "sinners".⁵⁷ Also, Sanders' reconstruction gives the impression that Jesus, as a good "covenantal nomist", simply assumed the salvation of the Israelites and then went on to add the wicked to the redemption rolls, whereas there is evidence that Jesus did call the whole of Israel to repentance (as John the Baptist before him, who also denied the automatic salvific effect of the covenant), and that the actual offence of Jesus was caused by the fact that he redefined salvation as tied to the decision each individual had to make for or against himself as God's eschatological representative.⁵⁸ Sanders' claim that Jesus did not preach - or at least did not stress - repentance is further weakened by his disregard for such widely attested gospel motifs as "entering the Kingdom", a motif which, as Bruce Chilton argues, necessarily implies repentance.⁵⁹

Sanders further argues that Jesus' preferential treatment of the sinners is distinctive in the sense that that it was not continued by the first Christians: " 'sinners' are hard to find in the early church"⁶⁰. Nevertheless, there is a strong analogy between Jesus' admission of sinners without an official mode of repentance

and Paul's admission of Gentiles without circumcision, which at least allows the possibility of the latter's dependence on the former. Just as Paul disregards national boundaries and, as Sanders says, strikes at the doctrine of election, Jesus disregards religious and social boundaries.

To sum up, in both political and religious terms, Sanders seems to assume a historical situation in which conflict is minimised and continuity, harmony, or at least a lack of serious conflict is posited. This model can, however, be seriously challenged on both historical and exegetical grounds.

In his first book, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* **Marcus J. Borg** concentrates on the political dimension of Jesus' career, by which he means Jesus' relationship to the culture or social world of his time, his concern for the shape and direction of his "polis", first century Palestine. Already in this monograph, some of the major planks of his reconstruction appear: his search for a new interpretative framework for his portrait, which he finds in the notion of *conflict*: conflict between Rome and Israel on the one hand and within it the conflict between Jesus and his contemporaries on the other. In his discussion of previous eschatological models he criticises the Bultmannian existentialist interpretation of eschatology for not only demythologizing but also dehistoricising the New Testament and depriving Jesus' story of its corporate and historical dimensions. At the same time, he wants to do justice to the sense of urgency, the "bells of crisis" pealing throughout the synoptic gospels, without leaving the copious wisdom material out of account. It is in this context of historical crisis that he finds a place for the gospel material relating Jesus' disputes with the Pharisees: instead of being later church creations necessitated by the delay of the parousia, these traditions originate in an

actual conflict of alternative programs espoused by rival renewal movements, both concerned with what it meant to be a people of God.

In order to clarify the nature of this conflict, Borg offers an analysis of the historical setting of first century Palestine as a society under pressure: Roman colonial rule, often embodied in incompetent or insensitive client kings or prefects, the introduction of Roman taxation doubling the tax burden of the population, and in general, the threat to Jewish identity of Gentile presence in the land brought forth several renewal movements all concerned to offer a solution to this situation and competing for the loyalty of the people. This was a "hermeneutical, exegetical battle"⁶¹, which was especially bitter between Jesus and the Pharisees because they represented "competing views of the same ideology"⁶², and were involved in a struggle "concerning the correct interpretation of Torah"⁶³, an issue whose historical and political consequences both parties were aware of.

Borg is careful to point out that the real nature of this conflict is for the most part presented in the gospels in terms of a struggle between genuine and false (individual) piety. This presentation serves the purposes of paranesis for readers for whom the original substance of the conflict is no longer an issue. Consequently, instead of explaining away the gospel picture of conflict, it should be understood not as a criticism of Pharisaic "hypocrisy", but rather as an indictment of the Pharisaic program of holiness understood as separation.

According to Borg, the quest for holiness should be understood as a cultural dynamic undergirding not only the Jewish resistance to Rome, but also the program of renewal groups like the Pharisees, who sought to extend the priestly rules of purity into everyday life. (In contrast to Sanders, Borg accepts Neusner's definition of the Pharisaic movement as "havurah", a table fellowship sect eating every meal in a priestly degree of purity.⁶⁴ For them, table fellowship served as a

powerful symbol of holiness understood as separation, representing Israel's cohesiveness in the face of the threat of Gentile domination.

Jesus accepted the central role of table fellowship and used it as a weapon against the Pharisaic understanding of holiness.⁶⁵ By the deliberately provocative act of dining with the "sinners" (whom Borg defines as the nonobservant, who due to double taxation were forced to choose paying the Roman tax rather than the Temple tax and were consequently ostracised by the observant⁶⁶ as well as the flagrantly immoral, quislings like the tax collectors and the representatives of certain despised trades) Jesus rejected the understanding of holiness as separation and advocated instead an understanding of holiness as contagious, triumphing in any confrontation.⁶⁷ Consequently, many of Jesus' parables are a defense of his table fellowship practice as a celebration of the return of the outcasts into the community of Israel. The practice itself, on the other hand, can be regarded as "an acted parable of what Israel should be"⁶⁸, and was perceived by Jesus' opponents as such. Jesus' concern with the outcasts should not be interpreted, then, as a mission only to the lost, aiming to reintegrate them into society, rather, it is a criticism of a national tendency towards separation, addressing the "lost sheep of Israel", the nation as a whole.

In this context, Mark 7:15 should be seen not as an abrogation of the food laws (there is no indication that these were an issue during the ministry, as the later indecision of the early church shows), but rather as the denial of the importance of the ritual purity of hands during meals, the denial of the validity of one of the main requirements for membership in a "havurah".⁶⁹

Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees as "leaven" or "unmarked grave" or "blind leaders" is not an attack on the shortcomings of their individual piety, or their negligence as religious leaders, but it is "a judgment on those who had set Israel on

a course that did not produce what Yahweh desired⁷⁰. The parable of the Money in Trust (Matt 25:14-30/Luke 19:12-27) brings together two elements of this criticism: it brings out the preservative aspect of the holiness program as well as the role of the scribes as caretakers of Torah: their apparent care concealing a basic carelessness, the survival intention underlying the quest for holiness.⁷¹ The recurring motif of unproductivity in the images of the vineyard, the fig tree, salt and light, unjust steward etc. , although applied in the gospels as warnings to the followers of Jesus in a post-Easter situation, originally refer to Israel's crisis, not simply as Israel's irresponsiveness to Jesus, but the crisis antedating Jesus' ministry.⁷²

The alternative paradigm Jesus offers is a response to this crisis. In parables like the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:23-25), the original point is challenging those who are aware of living under the mercy of God, Israel, to notice that the mercy shown them is to have its consequences in showing mercy in turn.⁷³ Jesus' program is a conscious replacement of holiness as the content of the "imitatio Dei" with mercy as the deliberate echoes of the Holiness code of Lev 19 in e.g. Luke 27:36/Matt 5: 38-48 demonstrate.⁷⁴ It is in this context of inclusive mercy that the command of loving one's enemies is to be understood: it is not primarily one's personal enemy, but the nation's enemies (Rome or the Gentiles) that are meant, as the specificity of the illustrations (e.g. going an extra mile with a Roman legionaire) make clear. In Matt 5:9, the highest status is assigned to the peacemakers, who will be called Sons of God (a designation of Israel) because they are willing to disinterestedly come between two contending parties.⁷⁵

Jesus does not deny the importance of holiness as an intended characteristics of Israel, but he views holiness as a transformative power not in need of protection. His practice as an exorcist and a healer demonstrates the power of holiness overpowering uncleanness. (Here Borg draws attention to an interesting

continuity between Jesus' understanding of holiness as contagious and Paul's advice to believers with nonbelieving spouses in 1Cor 7:12-14⁷⁶)

According to Borg, one of the best attested features of the gospel tradition is the controversy stories between Jesus and his opponents about the Sabbath. Jesus seems to have deliberately chosen the Sabbath as an issue by taking the initiative to heal, in the presence of his opponents. Borg interprets this as a revolutionary gesture pointing not to the abrogation of the Sabbath but to its subordination to the deeds of mercy rather than the quest for holiness.⁷⁷ The fact that in John's Gospel (John 5:17) Jesus defends his Sabbath healings by an appeal to the *imitatio Dei* is consistent with this synoptic theme.⁷⁸

At issue in each of these conflict situations was not whether the Torah deserved one's loyalty, rather, Jesus offered a different interpretation of Torah relating to those aspects which were responsible for Israel's present historical structures.

Borg understands the Temple action as a protest against the role of the Temple in the ideology of "militant separation from the Gentiles"⁷⁹, an ideology based on a selective reading of Israel's history and rooted in the conviction that God would defend the sanctuary. Jesus calls this ideology into question by prophetically threatening the Temple and Jerusalem with destruction (e.g. Luke 19:41-44). Their fate, however, is contingent: it depends on a historical choice of violent resistance to Rome, which is the historical consequence of "continuing to pursue the quest for holiness as separation".⁸⁰

In Borg's subsequent work there is a noticeable shift towards a much more general picture of the dominant consciousness of first century Palestine as the world of "conventional wisdom". This comprehensive ethos was grounded in sacred tradition and had its focal points in the values of family, wealth, honour and

virtue.⁸¹ This worldview was organised on the basis of rewards and punishments and was the primary source of a person's identity. Roman occupation occasioned a crisis in this worldview to which it responded with the survival strategy of the "politics of holiness".

Jesus was also a "revitalization movement founder", whose concern was the renewal of Israel, "the transformation of the Jewish social world".⁸² Like the classical prophets of Israel, he indicted the ruling elites of Israel, he threatened them with historical catastrophe unless they repented of the ideology of violent resistance to Rome, and was finally executed as a political rebel dying for "a crime of which he was innocent and his compatriots were guilty".⁸³ Jesus' wisdom teaching challenges the "broad way" of conventional wisdom by offering an alternative "way of transformation". He radicalises the Torah "by applying it to the inner self rather than simply to behaviour".⁸⁴ His "politics of compassion" derives from his vision of reality as ultimately gracious and compassionate. In contrast to viewing it as hostile, indifferent or a judge, images that make self-preservation "the first law of our being", for Jesus "reality is marked by a cosmic generosity".⁸⁵

Perhaps the greatest merit of Borg's reconstruction - and this must have especially been the case in 1984, when his first book was published - is the way he presents Jesus as thoroughly political (in the sense of being deeply involved in the life of his own society) without following Brandon in presenting Jesus as an anti-Roman revolutionary. This allows him to account for a number of the conflict stories in the synoptic tradition. His chosen context, *conflict*, allows him to present a coherent picture by placing the conflict between Jesus and his contemporaries inside the larger conflict between Rome and Israel. The hypothesis as it is worked out in Borg's first book has great explanatory power. Presenting the disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees not as a conflict between "true" and "false" piety but as two

alternative visions of the way Israel should be faithful to God is also a gain. There is a danger, however, which is especially apparent in Borg's later works, of oversimplification: using the sharp contrast between the "politics of holiness" versus the "politics of compassion" is reminiscent of earlier generalisations about legalistic religion versus the religion of grace. It seems to be very difficult to do justice to the broad tradition of conflict material in the gospels without falling into the old trap of treating Judaism as a dark backdrop to Christianity.⁸⁶ However, Borg stresses over and over again that the conflict was essentially an intra-Jewish one, and that Jesus offered his critique in the tradition of the classical biblical prophets.

Another problem with this contrast is that in his desire to find an immediate relevance to his construal of Jesus' ministry, in his later books Borg equates the dominant ethos of first century Judaism with what he calls "conventional wisdom". For example, a basic tenet of conventional wisdom, Borg says, is that wealth is a sign of God's favour. Yet Paula Fredriksen notes the fact that at the time of the Roman occupation Jewish religious regulations mandating charity actually weakened the webbing of patronage⁸⁷, so that Judaism in fact counteracted the possibility of using wealth to buy religious privilege.

N. T. Wright presents the conflict between Jesus and his contemporaries in terms of a clash between Israel's controlling story and Jesus' subversive retelling of this story. This clash necessarily leads to confrontation with those that have a different reading. The hostility against Jesus evident in the gospel tradition is the result of Jesus' redefinition of Israel's most cherished symbols. Wright, in contrast to Sanders, does not question the historicity of the controversy stories⁸⁸, but he claims that their meaning is not the one traditionally assigned to them. "They are about eschatology and politics, not religion and morality".⁸⁹ Following an exhaustive survey of first century Pharisaic movements he concludes

that the contrast between the anti-Roman revolutionary zeal of Shammaite Pharisaism and the way of peace advocated by Jesus makes the conflict probable.⁹⁰ Jesus did not merely bring an alternative halakah; he challenged the *function* of Israel's religious laws as "a boundary fence around Israel".⁹¹ He claimed that it was time to relativise "the God-given markers of Israel's distinctiveness" for the sake of an alternative program of love of enemies and non-violence.⁹² So far, Wright's arguments follow Borg's original thesis fairly closely. The point where he intensifies and in part alters it is at the connection between Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees and Jesus' attitude to the temple and priesthood. This is where, for Wright, the conflict reaches its high point. According to Wright, Jesus attacked the Temple as "the talisman of nationalist violence" and consciously set himself up as its replacement and functional alternative. One larger question in this respect is whether the Temple and its authorities were in fact the centre of national resistance. As Paula Fredriksen notes, Josephus claims that the priests tried to quiet the crowds whenever anti-Roman feeling threatened to break out.⁹³ Another objection may be that the early Christians did not seem to regard the Temple as an obsolete institution even after the death and resurrection of Jesus, with the Jerusalem community still taking part in the Temple service. Paul even uses the images connected to the Temple in a positive sense in Rom 9. "Why use such images as metaphors if Jesus himself condemned their referents as morally, socially and religiously wrong?"⁹⁴ - asks Paula Fredriksen.

Of the different understandings of the conflict between Jesus and his contemporaries, it is Borg's first reconstruction that seems to me to have the greatest "hermeneutical potential". In view of the importance of table fellowship with outcasts in the synoptic tradition as well as the importance of meal purity in Pharisaic circles, a dispute centering on these issues seems almost inevitable. Also convincing

is the way Borg presents this conflict in terms of different programs for Israel, rather than as the antagonism of inner piety and external religiosity. Less likely is the way Wright takes this antithesis to the extreme by presenting the official representatives of Judaism as violent nationalists.

Crossan's important contribution is drawing attention to the invisible but powerful faultline between the empire and a colonised people; nevertheless, concentration on this leads him to ignore other aspects of the conflicts that determine Jesus' relationship with his contemporaries. Also, his picture of peasants as totally destitute seems exaggerated.

Sanders, on the other hand, assumes too much continuity between Jesus and his compatriots. J. P. Meier even accuses him of standing the criterion of dissimilarity on its head⁹⁵ by discounting any incident that presents Jesus as differing from or opposing the normative Judaism of his time.

3.3.3. Reconstructions that employ sound analogies whose probability can be established by valid empirical proof are preferable to those that do not.

The Cynic Analogy

According to Crossan, Jesus was a Jewish Cynic peasant who wanted to effect social change by his egalitarian movement. The term Cynic, however, is problematic in view of the predominantly urban location of Cynics as opposed to the rural mission of Jesus. Moreover, itinerancy and poverty were a self-chosen lifestyle for the Cynics, demonstrating their self-sufficiency, while Jesus emphasised dependence on God.⁹⁶ According to Ben Witherington, Crossan's designation of Jesus as a Cynic amounts to

nothing more than stating that "both Jesus and the Cynics were radicals of some sort who were somewhat similar in what they opposed but not at all similar in what they sought to construct."⁹⁷ Also, itinerancy in the case of Jesus was not so much a technique to avoid brokerage, but rather a missionary strategy, especially considering the fact that "almost no destination in Galilee was a full day's journey from either Nazareth or Capernaum".⁹⁸ There are undeniably "Cynic-like" features in Jesus' attitude, his disparagement of wealth, his refusal of flattering respect, his repudiation of conventional wisdom.⁹⁹ Yet Jesus' subversiveness and independence from institutions, including institutionalised religion, is more a function of his role as a charismatic prophet than the detachment of a streetwise philosopher.

Revealingly, Crossan himself seems less than convinced by his designation of Jesus as Cynic. In *The Historical Jesus* he explains Jesus' brand of 'Cynicism' with the words "...call it, if you will, Jewish and rural Cynicism rather than Greco-Roman and urban Cynicism".¹⁰⁰ In *The Birth of Christianity* he drops the label altogether, because now he sees Jesus' followers not as Cynic-like counter-cultural, self-sufficient individuals, but rather as totally dispossessed, destitute, who are not in a position to choose their poverty and consequently they are "not invited to give up everything but accept their loss of everything as judging not them but the system that had done it to them".¹⁰¹

The Cynic analogy, then, establishes no more than a distant possibility of a direct relationship between Jesus and the Cynics. It calls attention to the subversive aspects of Jesus' message while leaving the alternative he offered unexplained.

Galilean Holy Men

In an effort to offer an alternative to both the scholarly and the popular image of Jesus, Borg turns to cross-cultural religious typology and characterises Jesus primarily as a "Spirit-filled person in the charismatic stream of Judaism"¹⁰², a Jewish holy man in the tradition of biblical mediators like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah and Ezekiel and similar in this respect to other Galilean holy men like Honi the Circle-Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa. Typically, these Spirit-filled mediators experience an initiatory vision into the world of Spirit followed by a testing or ordeal. In Jesus' case, the stories of his baptism and temptation follow this pattern, and his practice of meditative prayer (emphasised by Luke) as well as his address of God as Abba can most plausibly be explained by the intensity of his spiritual experience.¹⁰³ Borg derives Jesus' own sense of authority (cf. Mark 11:27-33) as well as the impression he made on others from an awareness of "the Spirit of God flowing through him".¹⁰⁴

This dimension is usually missing from reconstructions of the historical Jesus, although a fairly strong case can be made in its favour. On the one hand, we know that some of the early followers of Jesus, like Paul, did have mystical experiences¹⁰⁵, and on the other there are pointers within the Gospel tradition (e.g. Luke 10:18 or Mark's account of Jesus' baptism in 1:9-11) that indicate similar experiences in Jesus' life. Also, Borg's argument that Jesus' own sense of authority as well as the way others reacted to him may derive from his direct experience of the world of Spirit as well is also convincing. From his second book onwards, Borg considers this aspect of his sketch as fundamental, underlying his other "typological" proposals. The analogy he establishes between Jesus and other Spirit-filled charismatics is strong enough to be able to establish not merely possibility, but probability: it is derived from a history-of-religions analysis, memories of local religious figures and gospel material with a strong claim to authenticity. The fact that

he supplements it with several other models like "subversive sage", "social prophet" and "revitalization movement founder" allows him to construct a well rounded portrait. Ben Witherington suggests that Borg's awareness that any one model is likely to be inadequate for characterising Jesus makes his proposals much stronger than other models that focus on only one paradigm.¹⁰⁶ Borg has been criticised, however, for failing to apply the designation *Messiah* to Jesus, despite the fact that if he possessed all the characteristics Borg assigns to him, he must have had an elevated sense of his own identity.¹⁰⁷

Prophets

In Wright's view, the announcement of the Kingdom as liberation as well as judgement places Jesus in the line of Old Testament prophets. Wright demonstrates convincingly how Jesus models his ministry on a range of prophets, with the closest ties to John the Baptist, who also warns of the coming disaster and with his water-baptism for the forgiveness of sins seems to bypass the Temple cult.¹⁰⁸ (Wright has other analogies for Jesus from contemporary or near-contemporary Jewish history. Just as Josephus, recognising the futility of resistance told the story of Israel's god going over to the Romans, Wright argues, Jesus could come to the same conclusion.¹⁰⁹ And just as Bar-Kochba could express an "inaugurated eschatology", behaving towards his followers as though he were already king and have coins minted numbering the years from 1 while still before the final victory, Jesus could hold together the same elements in tension. While both parallels are able to demonstrate that it was indeed possible to think along these lines in Palestine in the first two centuries, the distance between the social location of Jesus and these two figures as well as the difference between their aims (finding favour with a mighty

patron in Josephus' case and achieving military victory in Bar-Kochba's) keep these options at the level of possibility rather than probability.)

For Meier, it is the miracle tradition that holds the key to a basic understanding of how Jesus saw himself and his mission. In view of the fact that only Moses, Elijah and Elisha were represented as miracle-working Israelites in the Old Testament and also that Elijah was expected to return to usher in the restoration of Israel, Meier thinks that Jesus consciously chose to present himself as a miracle-working prophet in the mould of Elijah.¹¹⁰ This analogy, or rather Jesus' conscious assuming of the role of an Elijah-type prophet, will probably be elaborated in the third volume of *The Marginal Jew*. Without a detailed knowledge of Meier's arguments that will presumably establish the basis of the Elijah-analogy, or rather, Jesus' conscious choice of this model, one may nevertheless point out some of the differences between Elijah and Jesus as presented in the gospels, especially in Luke. I have in mind the Lukan episode of the disciples' offer to bid fire to come down from heaven to consume the Samaritan villages that had rejected Jesus, and Jesus' refusal (Luke 9, 52-56), with clear references to the contrasting story in 2 Kings 1, 9-16.

3.4. Text-Related Criteria

Some of the criteria proposed in the period after the second quest, such as A. E. Harvey's **historical constraints** and **Klausner's test** proposed by E. P. Sanders, concentrate on the question whether Jesus transcended, and if yes, to what extent, the constraints imposed on him by his own culture and historical situation. This question is extremely difficult to apply as a criterion in trying to decide the historicity of material. In fact, the whole of the reconstruction is an attempt to answer it - in

this respect, the third quest can rightly be characterised as a quest for context. Also, the criterion of **double similarity and double dissimilarity** proposed by N. T. Wright has been designed to take care of just this problem. As with the two previous suggestions, this latter criterion, useful and indispensable as it is, is too broad to be used in isolation. Supplemented with the other criteria of authenticity, however, it should serve as the primary criterion of historicity.

J. D. Crossan's criterion of **hermeneutical potential**, as we have seen, has a limited application, especially in trying to glean information about Jesus' attitude to the law. In general, however, explanations involving this criterion are tied too closely to the overall hypothesis. Sanders' explanation, for example, of the change between Jesus' kingdom-expectation and that of the early church - that the resurrection transformed the already existing, "otherworldly-earthly" expectation into an "otherworldly-heavenly"¹¹¹ one - has considerable hermeneutical potential, but only if one shares the overall view of Jesus as an eschatological prophet.

Meier's criterion of **rejection and execution** which says that a good hypothesis should be able to say what words and deeds of Jesus led to his crucifixion is, despite the objections enumerated in Chapter 2, a useful rule. Unfortunately, Meier has not yet applied it in his reconstruction. This is one more reason to look forward to Volume 3 of *A Marginal Jew*. As far as the related question of how Jesus may have viewed his approaching death - or to use Schweitzer's expression, the question whether he went to Jerusalem to work or to die - is concerned, opinions, predictably, differ considerably. "Having given up the gospels' reports that Jesus deliberately sought death, criticism has been unable to determine whether he was executed because he was rightly perceived to threaten the existing order, or was misunderstood, or simply found himself at the wrong place at the wrong time."¹¹² This makes it understandable why, although the fact and manner of Jesus' execution

is *the* most securely established fact of Jesus' life, it is, nevertheless, an enigma in need of interpretation and not the pivot of the reconstructions that could shed light on the more ambiguous events. There is only one scholar, N. T. Wright, who thinks that Jesus considered it his vocation to die as a representative of Israel in exile, taking upon himself the suffering that would precede the time of salvation. According to Wright, "Jesus intended that his death should in some sense function sacrificially".¹¹³ Wright employs his criterion of double similarity and dissimilarity at this point, arguing that this interpretation can be derived from the Hebrew Bible and at the same time it explains the development of Christian atonement theology, but it is not identical to either. (It is doubtful, however, whether the criterion of double similarity and double dissimilarity should be employed to the *interpretation* of various motifs within the gospel tradition rather than particular texts. In this case, for example, it is not even a separate motif in the texts to which the criterion is applied, rather, it is Wright's own construal of Jesus' intentions based on an extrapolation from the texts. I suggest that the criterion used in isolation and as an arbiter of a hypothesis is not sufficiently rigorous.) The idea that Jesus intended to die a sacrificial death has been criticised from an ethical as well as from a critical standpoint. As to the latter, E. P. Sanders suggests that the "sayings which attribute to Jesus the will to die correspond so closely with what happened, and with early Christian doctrine, that the case for their creation by the early church is overwhelmingly strong".¹¹⁴ Moreover, this interpretation would suggest that Jesus deliberately orchestrated his own death by provoking the authorities to kill him. "...the view that he plotted his own redemptive death makes him strange in any century and thrusts the entire drama into his peculiar inner psyche."¹¹⁵ Sanders argues instead that although Jesus probably knew that he was a marked man, and was determined not to flee, could still hope that God would intervene before he was

arrested.¹¹⁶ This hypothesis does not exclude the possibility of his giving his own death "martyrological significance".¹¹⁷ This latter scenario is convincingly argued for in Volume 2 of Meier's *A Marginal Jew* in the exegesis of the saying about drinking wine in the Kingdom of God (Mark 14:25) (see chapter 4).

The ethical objection to Jesus' deliberately seeking death is voiced by J. D. Crossan in *The Birth of Christianity*. He argues that a martyr's death should never be separated from his or her life of resistance to evil. "Martyrdom is a public witness in which official authority unleashes its full destructive power on an individual conscience. But it is an unfortunate necessity, an unwanted inevitability of conscientious resistance to systemic evil. Otherwise, resistance itself colludes with the violence it opposes."¹¹⁸ This objection, of course, has nothing to do with the historical plausibility of either of the options above, but it coheres with the second one.

3.4.1. Hypotheses that attempt to establish the historical plausibility of material as going back to Jesus by using the criteria of historicity, including the criterion of double similarity and double dissimilarity, are more satisfying than those that do not.

This criterion stresses the continuing importance of the traditional historical-critical tools in historical Jesus research. At the same time, it recognises the need to improve on the original criterion of dissimilarity.

E. P. Sanders

Sanders thinks that there are serious problems with the 'criteriology' developed in the new quest. First of all, it is closely related to the Bultmannian

emphasis on Jesus as the "bearer of the Word" and consequently on the sayings material. Sanders is sceptical about the ability of the criteria of authenticity to obtain enough reliable sayings by Jesus "to allow the picture of a believable Jewish figure whose work led to the Christian movement".¹¹⁹ The solution is to find a method which does rest on reliable material without being totally dependent on it. If we start with the sayings material then the core of authentic sayings will be too small as well as too controversial to serve as the basis for reconstruction. Also, the links between these sayings and the larger context of Jesus' fate and the history of the early church will be tenuous. Sanders thinks that the teaching reconstructed on the basis of the criteria will hardly prove offensive enough to explain Jesus' execution on the cross.¹²⁰ If, as form criticism has discovered, the context provided for the individual sayings is largely the creation of the evangelists, what is needed is the establishment of another context, since "the material does not interpret itself".¹²¹ For Sanders, this larger context is established by placing the basic facts of Jesus' career into the context of first century Judaism.

Sanders insists, however, on the importance of the sayings within the overall scheme. He does not think that there is a persuasive alternative to form criticism as far as judgements about the nature of the gospel material are concerned, yet some of the tests used by form criticism he considers unreliable, especially as far as the general laws in the change of the tradition are concerned.¹²² He is also critical of some of the criteria, especially the negative use of the criterion of dissimilarity. This criterion has been regarded as rigorous and scientific, nevertheless, by attributing to Jesus only what is unique, it cuts him off from both his Jewish contemporaries and his own followers. In addition to the fact that we do not know enough about either of these groups to arrive at firm conclusions, a more serious problem is that the criterion is biased against Judaism, and has a tendency to misrepresent it. The two

pitfalls in arguing for Jesus' uniqueness are on the one hand the fact that trying to prove that Jesus was different from Judaism can easily mean that he was better, and on the other that it distracts attention from his continuity with "the biblical tradition at its best".¹²³ Nevertheless, Sanders himself uses a criterion which is closely related to distinctiveness; for him, a basic means of the verification or falsification of a historical hypothesis about Jesus is "cross-examination": a passage can be considered historically reliable if it "goes against the grain" of what the evangelists intended. He admits that this criterion is too crude, since some material that is "with the grain" might also be historical. Still, considering that in historical research there is no means of establishing absolutely what is true or false, "against the grain" can be useful in reaching probable conclusions.¹²⁴

The Temple Action as a Starting Point

Jesus' action in the Temple, interpreted as a symbolic prophetic sign of destruction and restoration plays a fundamental role in Sanders' hypothesis. Interpreted within the framework of Jewish restoration eschatology, its function is to provide the middle element in the correlation between Jesus' verbal "threat" against the Temple (Mark 14:58) and the larger context. The remarkable inner coherence of the thesis created by Sanders' method of focusing on Jesus' action within its first century context has been hailed by reviewers as providing solid ground after the methodological scepticism created by an exclusive concentration on the sayings tradition. In fact, Sanders' construal of the Temple incident has almost become one of the 'assured results' of scholarship, taken over by other scholars, sometimes unquestioningly.¹²⁵

In view of the pivotal role of the Temple action in Sanders' reconstruction, it is surprising how little attention he pays to demonstrating the

historicity of the narrative. Robert J. Miller draws attention to the fact that while Sanders argues at length in favour of an understanding of the incident as the cause of Jesus' arrest and execution, he simply takes its historicity for granted. Since Sanders coordinates the Temple demonstration closely with the sayings about the Temple's destruction, his arguments for the authenticity of the latter double as evidence for the historicity of the former.¹²⁶

Furthermore, even if we consider the historicity of the incident beyond doubt, we can find convincing arguments for its interpretation as a cleansing rather than symbolic destruction. Since this interpretation is the one provided by the sources, the burden of proof is definitely on anyone who argues for an alternative solution. It is doubtful whether the meaning of the action as a prophetic symbol could really be self-evident for Jesus' contemporaries if "the evangelists, all of whom were good first-century Jews, failed to grasp the imagery".¹²⁷ Also, in the case of another prophet predicting the doom of the Temple, Jesus ben Ananias, the reaction of the bystanders does not imply that they understood the prophetic action as a prediction of destruction and restoration, as Sanders argues the witnesses of Jesus' deed certainly did. In general, Sanders cannot convincingly demonstrate that there was a pervasive expectation linking the Temple's destruction and its restoration, so he has to argue that the connection was "perhaps too obvious to be mentioned"¹²⁸ - a perfect example of an argument from silence.

Sanders' argument for viewing the episode as cleansing to be a later interpretation because of the evangelists' embarrassment over Jesus' militant behaviour in the Temple does not square with the fact that they were clearly not embarrassed to include Jesus' prophecies about the destruction of the Temple. As C. A. Evans points out, Mark was certainly not embarrassed to frame his account of the

Temple act with the parable of the fig tree, with its clear implications about the fate of the Temple.¹²⁹

Another problem for Sanders' reconstruction is the difficulty of explaining how the event could have been small enough for Jesus to avoid immediate arrest and yet serious enough to be the cause of his eventual arrest. Also, Robert J. Miller can rightly ask if, as Sanders suggests, Jesus only overturned one or two tables, this would not have defeated the very purpose of the prophecy, namely, providing an occasion for public teaching.¹³⁰

Not only are there several problems concerning Sanders' interpretation of the Temple demonstration, the status of the incident itself has been called into question. In a provocative essay, David Seeley argues that in view of the difficulties of finding a plausible historical context for the Temple act, we encounter the fewest problems of interpretation if we consider it to be Mark's literary creation.¹³¹ Seeley argues that the way Mark carefully weaves the theme of the Temple through the last chapters of his gospel - beginning with the key scene of the Temple act setting in motion the plot which leads to Jesus' death, through the trial scene where Jesus is accused by false witnesses of threatening the Temple (the same charge repeated at the crucifixion), to the climactic moment of the tearing of the Temple curtain at Jesus' death - serves the purpose of juxtaposing the Temple and the Messiah as mutually exclusive modes of salvation while avoiding a head-on confrontation with the sensitivity of his readers concerning the Temple (hence the interpretation as cleansing rather than destruction). (It is noteworthy that Seeley's interpretation caused Paula Fredriksen to change her previously pro-Sanders position concerning the Temple action. She also asks the question: "How could Jesus have made such a spectacular prophecy which Peter, John and the others must have known, and yet Paul never mentions it at all?"¹³²)

We do not need to question the historicity of the Temple action itself in order to realise that the burden of proof is indeed on Sanders when he proposes to make it the cornerstone of his reconstruction, especially since his interpretation differs so considerably from the one in the original narrative. In fact, there are other facts on his list that could have provided a more secure starting point for his reconstruction; first and foremost the reason and manner of Jesus' execution. The major reason for the key role of the Temple incident in Sanders' hypothesis is its possible connection to Jewish restoration eschatology. In James D. G. Dunn's words, Sanders' conclusion that Jesus' message belongs with Jewish restoration eschatology "becomes itself a criterion for judging the probability or otherwise of Jesus having any other, different or distinctive emphases".¹³³

Words and Deeds

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Sanders' methodology is his distinction between sayings and events in the Jesus tradition and his claim that the latter are more reliable historical tools in trying to establish the list of "almost indisputable facts" than the former. In the case of the sayings, he says, "we never have absolute certainty of authenticity, and we probably have the original context of any given saying seldom, if ever".¹³⁴ We have seen, however, that the narratives of events, like the Temple action, cannot bear the weight of "absolute certainty" either. Moreover, while the emphasis on events might be a useful methodological move when fruitless debates about the authenticity of sayings have to be counteracted, it can easily result in the disregard of large portions of the sayings tradition. Marcus Borg notes that the only crucial sayings used in Sanders' foundation are those concerning the Temple being destroyed and rebuilt, and even these sayings are not

used to establish a context; rather, they are interpreted within a context generated by other means.¹³⁵

Furthermore, it can be argued that a more careful consideration of the sayings tradition would have resulted in the addition of a few important facts to Sanders' list. One such fact is that Jesus was a teacher of parables and aphorisms, in Borg's words, "a teacher of subversive wisdom"¹³⁶. It seems that the admission of this fact would have been against the grain of Sanders' contention that because of his belief in the necessary imminence of the kingdom, Jesus did not have any social ethic or program. Another fairly certain fact, J. D. G. Dunn suggests, is Jesus' reputation as a successful exorcist, for which the textual warrants are just as strong as those behind Sanders' list.¹³⁷ In general, we may conclude that the problematic nature of the sayings material does not justify its neglect in favour of other narratives in the tradition.

In a seminal essay, Gerald Downing argues forcefully against the disjunction of words and deeds for several important reasons. First, the accounts of events in the tradition were just as liable to be reinterpreted as the accounts of sayings, since they are just as much bearers of meaning (in need of interpretation) as the latter. Once we ask about the meaning of a narrated action, we depend just as much on the interpretation of the community as in the case of the sayings. Second, both accounts of events and accounts of sayings intend to do something; words (speech-acts) have the same kind of performative force as actions. According to Downing, Sanders adopts the same unexamined dichotomy of words and deeds as Bultmann, only he reverses the usual preference.¹³⁸

Marcus J. Borg

The contribution of Marcus Borg to the discussion of method shows a clear transition from the acknowledgement of the relative usefulness of the criteria of authenticity in reconstructions towards their practical abandonment in favour of a more "flexible" approach. In his first book, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, although he argues that the new interpretative context for the Jesus tradition, the new "cornerstone" is the social matrix¹³⁹, he still uses a fairly traditional configuration of criteria: the positive form of dissimilarity, multiple attestation and environmental coherence. He argues forcefully against the negative use of dissimilarity because of its role in producing a minimal picture of Jesus' teaching and reducing it to what is neither Jewish nor Christian. Instead, Borg thinks that what is needed is a method that can uncover both continuity and discontinuity between Jesus and his environment.¹⁴⁰ In this framework, the positive form of discontinuity may play an important part in pointing to elements that are improbable to have been invented by the early church and that prove useful when we ask about issues which were "of not notable interest to the early church once it had left Palestine", when, among other things, the outcome of Israel's crisis was already known. Thus when "an interest in the structures and historical fate of Israel is perceived" in the gospels, we may have a primitive tradition that goes back at least to the early Palestinian church.¹⁴¹ Still, the criteria of authenticity cannot be our only guide, because, in Borg's view, the use of these criteria establishes a body of primitive tradition which still contains a number of conflicting elements that are "not amenable to explanation in terms of any single coherent reconstruction of the mission of Jesus".¹⁴²

This might be the main reason for Borg's gradual abandonment of the authenticity criteria in favour of the "broad strokes of a credible historical portrait".¹⁴³

The more global new questions of the third quest require new methods taken from the history of religions, the social sciences and cultural anthropology, which provide both comparative material and models of interpretation.¹⁴⁴ If one begins with the words of Jesus, Borg says, the result is radical historical scepticism, so another starting point is needed, which he finds in the typology of religious figures. The methodological impasse can be broken by first establishing a model on the basis of cross-cultural typology, which is then validated by the gospel text. (Unfortunately, Borg does not specify how this validation takes place.) The typological framework provides the Gestalt for locating and understanding the various gospel traditions. This method allows scholars to be more historically certain of the larger picture than "the historical exactness of each particular tradition".¹⁴⁵ In this way, instead of an earlier focus on problematic areas like Jesus' Messiahship, the salvific nature of his death, the question whether he wanted to found the church etc., to which only uncertain answers can be given, the results provided by the new method will be "more certain and more interesting".¹⁴⁶ Instead of a "rigorously methodical method", scholars in the third quest will "continue to be eclectic in making judgements". Borg likens this methodological flexibility to the intuitive "hunching" of a detective which is followed up by "the analysis of the forensic expert".¹⁴⁷ It is this second phase of the process, however, which remains unclarified in Borg's discussion of method.

While Borg may be right to observe the exegetical fallacy of starting a reconstruction with the analysis of a body of sayings whose interpretation is notoriously ambiguous, like the kingdom of God sayings, and that "it is a sound principle of interpretation to begin with what is clearest and then move to that which is more opaque"¹⁴⁸, he does not pay sufficient attention to the dangerous lack of control inherent in this approach. The dangers are especially apparent in Borg's invariable preference for Luke in his reconstruction, even when (as in the case of the

Nazareth manifesto of Luke 4) Luke's formulation is commonly attributed to the evangelist who replaced Mark's account of Jesus' "inaugural address" in Mark 1:15 with it. In this case, Borg argues for the possibility that "Jesus did use these words with reference to himself some other time in his ministry", then adds: "...even if Luke did create the story, it aptly describes what we have seen to be true on other grounds".¹⁴⁹ This kind of argument cannot be said to be illegitimate, because coherence with the overall hypothesis is an important factor, but when it is accompanied by a strict rejection of the historicity of a whole group of sayings (e.g. all of the future Son of Man sayings), then a much more self-critical approach would be appropriate, especially with respect to the question "to what extent Lukan motifs are attributed to Jesus".¹⁵⁰

N. T. Wright

Wright is also in favour of a major hypothesis followed by serious verification, instead of what he terms as "atomistic work on apparently isolated fragments".¹⁵¹ He goes so far as to divide contemporary research into two separate strands, the *Wredebahn* of radical scepticism and the *Schweitzerstrasse* of thoroughgoing eschatology, that is, the "new-new quest" and the third quest proper. In the third quest, Wright says, the "normal critical tools" of form criticism are bypassed, and the method proceeds by the route of hypothesis and verification.¹⁵² The aim is not so much the reconstruction of the historical Jesus, but rather the telling of large-scale narratives, which includes the examination of the relevant data to see how they fit into the story. Wright completely disassociates historical study from form criticism, and he argues for taking the gospels seriously as texts in their own right, considering them against the total background of first century Judaism. (This "bypassing" of form criticism is made possible for Wright by his reliance on

Kenneth Bailey's findings about story-telling in Near-Eastern peasant societies, on the basis of which Wright suggests that the narratives in the gospels are unlikely to be a secondary accretion, since stories are of fundamental importance in that culture.¹⁵³) He admits, however, that the inclusion of all the relevant data is ultimately more important than the simplicity of the hypothesis.¹⁵⁴ The method of establishing what the relevant data are is "the criterion of double dissimilarity and double similarity". This method takes into account the double context of first century Judaism and the early church, and by a "pincer movement" tries to arrive at the elements which are simultaneously similar and dissimilar to both, thus providing an implied starting point for Christianity within Judaism.¹⁵⁵ Wright demonstrates the superiority of this twofold criterion to the traditional use of dissimilarity which effectively detaches Jesus from his own context and later developments by, for example, his discussion of Jesus' attitude to purity laws, especially the saying (or parable) on defilement in Mark 7:15. The fact that the saying has to be expounded to the disciples in secret is a "tell-tale sign of Jesus' own context". "Double dissimilarity (the proposal is scandalous for Jews, the secrecy unnecessary for the early church) is balanced by double similarity (the dispute presupposes Jewish context; the new outlook was gradually and eventually worked out in the early church)..."¹⁵⁶

In *The New Testament and the People of God* Wright argues forcefully in favour of the possibility of a "Jewish form criticism of the synoptic tradition"¹⁵⁷, with the Jewish story-line as a basic component of the tradition, with scriptural associations in place from the very beginning and not added later to earlier, Hellenistic forms as the Bultmann school maintains. Also, he makes a case in favour of a strong oral tradition restraining memories of Jesus' different "performances" of sayings, stories and actions flowing straight into the different strands of the gospel tradition. In this way he is able to account for the differences in the synoptic tradition

using a much simpler hypothesis than what he calls the "pseudo-historical use of home-made 'criteria' "158. Since he uses "story" as a fundamental hermeneutical category, he is able to argue that it is a particular variation of the Jewish controlling story that provides the grid through which the evangelists and their tradents view the events; a grid that was ultimately given to them by Jesus himself.

In a way, this view of gospel origins does provide an elegant and simple account that can dispense with the complicated theories of the early church that characterises the Bultmannian approach. It can, however, create problems in another area, namely that of the exact relationship between the "theology" of Jesus and that of his first followers. Wright has been in my view rightly criticised for failing to work out with sufficient rigour his theory of this relationship. There is some truth in Crossan's harsh criticism that Wright "has not earned or even argued for [his] own presuppositions of gospel relations".¹⁵⁹ Although in his response to Crossan Wright argues that he does not reject the findings of tradition criticism about the relationships of written sources altogether in favour of the oral traditions hypothesis and that he does take note of the extremely complex interplay of oral and written traditions¹⁶⁰, he oversimplifies matters in the concrete analysis of texts. Because in his large-scale historical hypothesis he shifts his attention from the evangelists' intention to the mindset of Jesus, in his small-scale textual decisions he often assigns what is generally regarded as redactional material to Jesus. This conscious prioritising of the big picture over what he regards as pseudo-atomistic work resorting to "complex epicycles of *Traditionsgeschichte*"¹⁶¹ often leads to dubious exegetical decisions.

Perhaps the most obvious example is the way in which "the creative use of the Hebrew Bible vis-à-vis Jesus is traced back, with nagging consistency, to Jesus himself"¹⁶², especially the identification of Jesus with the Danielic Son of Man, which,

to use J. D. G. Dunn's expression, must bear a "phenomenal" weight in Wright's reconstruction.¹⁶³ Wright may be said to go further than his stated aim to create a "Jewish form criticism", since that in itself would only warrant assigning the scriptural echoes to Jesus' very first followers, but not in every case to Jesus himself. This further shift is not satisfactorily grounded in Wright's methodological argumentation, apart from the - in itself highly reasonable - statement that Jesus in all probability was not the "unreflective, instinctive, simplistic person"¹⁶⁴ many scholars make him out to be. It is one thing to allow for the originality and creativity of Jesus' approach to his ancestral tradition and quite another to assign to him each reflection using scriptural allusions in the gospel tradition. This procedure often results in a "Gestalt" of Jesus where he is "located (locked?) in a world of texts and ideas"¹⁶⁵, and is consequently a Jesus who is strangely dislocated sociologically. Wright does not deal in detail with the question of Jesus' place in the society of his time, and the related question of whether his social status could have made possible the degree of scribal sophistication Wright's hypothesis requires.

Examples of probably redactional material used in the reconstruction as historical include Wright's interpretation of the temptation story which is drafted into the portrait of Jesus on the basis of the possibility that something like this "...almost certainly took place as part of Jesus' mental, emotional and spiritual history"¹⁶⁶, or his treatment of Mark 7:15 as a cryptic invitation to abandon the food taboos, where, as Maurice Casey suggests, describing the invitation as cryptic does not invalidate the major objection to the likelihood of this interpretation, namely, that the attitude to food laws caused problems in the early church, and even Peter needed a vision to convince him that all foods could be eaten.¹⁶⁷ (Incidentally, it is Mark 7:15ff. where Wright chooses to demonstrate the use of his criterion of double dissimilarity and double similarity: the teaching is scandalous for Jews, the secrecy unnecessary for

the early church. As this example suggests, for this criterion to be really useful, a more careful investigation of the early community is necessary. Otherwise, the "pincer movement" moves from the direction of the (relatively) unknown towards the even less known.)

Another reason for the sometimes questionable interpretation of gospel material is the hypothesis that the controlling story Jesus identified with and reinterpreted is Israel's story of exile and return, more exactly the idea that for Jesus as well as for the majority of his Jewish contemporaries Israel was still in effect in exile. The effects of this overemphasis on the theme of exile is especially apparent in Wright's treatment of the parables. He insists that, contrary to the customary view of this genre, namely that the parables originally had a simple form, made a single point and were close to real life, it is the fuller explanations, "drawing out the thrust of the stories in terms of apocalyptic Jewish ideas" which are the earlier versions¹⁶⁸, cryptically and subversively retelling Israel's controlling story. Thus, in the parable of the prodigal son, for example, the younger son stands for Israel returning from exile, and the older for the mixed multitude grumbling about her reception. While the story may indeed contain echoes of the exile story, it is questionable whether the message Wright proposes could have been successfully communicated to the original hearers of the parable since, within the story, the elder brother is presented as the faithful, law-abiding one - an unlikely characterisation of the mixed multitude. As J. D. G. Dunn suggests, a much more plausible context for the parable is the original Lukan one, where Jesus tells the story in reply to the charges made against him because of his table-fellowship with sinners.¹⁶⁹ Wright's understanding of the parables as apocalyptic allegories, necessarily cryptic and veiled retellings of the story of the return from exile and within it the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the larger story, is best illustrated by his treatment of the parable of the sower.¹⁷⁰ There, "the seed is

the metaphor for the true Israel, who will be vindicated when her god finally acts, 'sown' again in her own land."¹⁷¹ The parable, then, announces that the true remnant is now returning from exile, in and through Jesus' ministry. This announcement has to remain cryptic, otherwise, "if too many understood too well, the prophet's liberty of movement, and perhaps his life, may be cut short"¹⁷², only the inner circle may be allowed into the deeper secret (hence the interpretation, which belongs closely to the parable). Again, this analysis, though not impossible, is quite implausible, especially in view of the use of the term "the word" in the interpretation of the parable, which, according to J. D. G. Dunn, is "the language of the early churches' interpretation of the parable rather than that of Jesus".¹⁷³

Finally, another aspect of Wright's method (in which he follows E. P. Sanders) that needs to be questioned is his emphasis on the priority of Jesus' actions over his words. A fundamental feature of Wright's reconstruction is the way he arranges some key sayings around the account of one of Jesus' actions, allowing the sayings and the action to mutually interpret and illuminate each other. In principle, this is a sound way to proceed; it also entails, however, the idea that the accounts of deeds are somehow more secure and need less argumentation and interpretation than the accounts of the sayings. In this respect, my criticisms of Sanders apply to Wright as well, even though it seems clear that one of the main reasons for his preference for the narratives of the deeds is a desire to counterbalance an unjustified and one-sided preference for the sayings material evident in assertions such as Crossan's: "I find much more continuity in the words than I find in the deeds, because most of the deeds are creating history to suit prophecy."¹⁷⁴ Still, in the case of the narratives of Jesus' actions whose only source is the gospel tradition the same criteria should apply as the criteria used for the sayings.

In general, Wright's exegetical practice seems to take too many shortcuts even judged by the standards of his own principles. Discussing and criticising form criticism, Wright notes how extraordinarily complex the development of the synoptic tradition is, and how difficult it is to put each piece of the jigsaw in its proper place without distorting the contours. Besides simplicity, the main criteria Wright thinks a good historical hypothesis ought to meet is the ability to include all the data. He even asserts that should these two criteria clash, it is accounting for the material that should be judged more important than the tidiness of the hypothesis.¹⁷⁵ In his reconstruction, however, often the opposite process seems to happen; in a response to one of his critics, he claims that "loose ends are a sign of weakness, not of strength"¹⁷⁶. This might well be true in the case of scientific theory, but considering that history in general is much less tidy and our sources in particular are much more problematic, a greater degree of caution is necessary.

J. D. Crossan

One of the most immediately striking features of *The Historical Jesus* is its inventory of the Jesus tradition in the appendices. In this inventory Crossan arranges the material into chronological layers using a "scientific stratigraphy", then he locates each individual item in its own chronological layer. The method by which he analyses the items in the inventory is the exclusive use of the criterion of multiple attestation. Units or complexes that have the highest number of independent attestations and occur in the first chronological stratum have the greatest claim to authenticity. Crossan intends to work almost exclusively from the first stratum, from which he claims to form a working hypothesis about the historical Jesus.

Sources

In a paper published in Volume 44 of *Semeia* (1988), Crossan admitted that it was possible to reconstruct almost any picture of Jesus one wished, not only because of divergent presuppositions but also as a result of the nature of the texts and one's choice of text.¹⁷⁷ The validity of this observation is borne out by the way Crossan selects his texts in *The Historical Jesus*. The most conspicuous feature of his treatment of the sources is his marked preference for non-canonical over canonical material, evidenced also in some of his earlier works, especially in *Four Other Gospels* and *The Cross That Spoke*.¹⁷⁸

Q₁-Thomas

Crossan is one of a number of scholars who, although there is no documentary evidence for Q, treat it not merely as an independent document but also as a gospel, in whose development several stages can be posited and which reflects the life and ideas of a separate Christian community. The first layer, Q₁, portrays Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, the proclaimer of a presently available Kingdom of God. This layer is non-apocalyptic and reflects the theology of the early Q community who, as faithful and peaceful followers of Jesus, continued his itinerant movement of "miracle and meal". After the failure of their mission and their rejection, however, they embarked on a threatening and vengeful apocalyptic eschatology expressed in the successive layers of Q.¹⁷⁹ There is a noticeable shift towards a more radical view of Q in Crossan: in his 1988 *Semeia* paper he acknowledges that "...my own theological preference is certainly for a sapiential over an apocalyptic Jesus...but I now presume that both interpretations were there probably from the very beginning."¹⁸⁰ To his discussion of Q in *The Historical Jesus* Crossan also adds the cautious disclaimer that Q₁ and Q₂ are not "historically

successive interpretations of Jesus, only compositionally successive in the development of the Sayings Gospel Q"¹⁸¹. Nevertheless, if these two successive layers do reflect two successive stages in the life of the "Q-community", it is hard not to see them as being also historically successive, as indeed later on in his book Crossan himself admits: "an original sapiential layer was amplified by an intercalation of an apocalyptic one, representing the before and after of the failed Jewish mission".¹⁸²

The unusually early dating of parts of the Gospel of Thomas (according to Crossan, one of Thomas' layers was composed in the fifties in Jerusalem) is closely connected to Crossan's ideas about Q. Several of his critics draw attention to the (viciously) circular nature of Crossan's argument: having decided about Q₁ that it contained non-eschatological sayings, "one then proceeds to place non-eschatological Thomas unusually early, and to demote the eschatological sections of Q to later redactional layers".¹⁸³

Secret Mark

Although this text is known only from quotations by Clement of Alexandria and its only fragmentary copy is the one discovered by Morton Smith in 1958; furthermore, it is generally thought to be a later adaptation of Mark in a decidedly gnostic direction,¹⁸⁴ Crossan, following Helmut Koester, regards it as an earlier version of Mark, which later became expanded into canonical Mark. Its original story of a young man raised from the dead and undergoing a nocturnal initiation, was heavily censored by canonical Mark because of its connotations of "sacred homosexuality of baptismal eroticism".¹⁸⁵ The ingenious author of canonical Mark, endeavouring to make the story look like a "pastiche rather than an excision", simply dismembered the story into two parts, the miraculous raising (also present in

John 11) devolving into Mark 16:1-8, and the motif of nocturnal initiation of a naked young man represented in Mark 14: 51-52.¹⁸⁶ Apart from the improbability of Crossan's reconstruction, a serious problem with his presentation of Secret Mark is that it does not add anything significant to his portrait of Jesus, so one gets the impression that the sole purpose of its inclusion is to demonstrate the devious manner in which a canonical author distorted the original tradition about him.

The Gospel of Peter

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Crossan's work is his treatment of the passion narratives. Based on his conviction that the disciples of Jesus knew absolutely nothing about the events of his last days beyond the mere fact of the crucifixion, he maintains that similarly to the testimonia in Qumran as well as the Lukan and Matthaean birth narratives that contain no biographical information, the passion narrative is the result of the "historicisation of prophecy". "Hide the prophecy, tell the narrative, invent the history".¹⁸⁷ Exponents of a highly developed, scribal, "exegetical" Christianity, after intense meditation on some scriptural passages, organised them "into a coherent and sequential story".¹⁸⁸ For example, fusing together prophetic passages like Zech 12: 10-14 and 3:1-5 and combining them with stories like that of the mocking of Carabas the fool in Philo's *Flaccus*, they invented the episode of "Jesus as Mocked King". The Epistle of Barnabas shows the initial stages of this process, which then comes to fruition in the so-called Cross Gospel, which Crossan reconstructs from the Gospel of Peter. Besides the prophetic passages, the author(s) used archetypal storylines like "innocence rescued" (exemplified by stories like Daniel in the lions' den or Susanna) and "martyrdom vindicated" (as seen in e.g. 2Maccabees 7). The structure of the Cross Gospel can be correlated to the elements of these genres; in the "innocence rescued"

stories the final scene is invariably about deliverance and restoration to the same or higher status as before, a restoration that must take place in front of the victim's enemies. In the Cross Gospel, Jesus' resurrection is witnessed by the Jewish leaders, the crowd and Roman soldiers all present at the tomb. For Crossan, this proves that the Cross Gospel, since it corresponds so closely to the "innocence rescued" pattern, is the original form of the passion narrative, which served as a basis for the canonical accounts.

The invention of these narratives was so successful that in the final version the prophetic allusions were "completely buried under the narrative surface".¹⁸⁹ The basic story, found in the Cross Gospel, was later developed in the passion narratives of the four canonical gospels. Here again, as in the case of Secret Mark, "canonical Mark" proves to be brilliantly creative: true to his own theology, which emphasises suffering and death over against triumph and vindication, he dissects the resurrection scene found in the Cross Gospel, in which "Jesus rises, Rome converts"¹⁹⁰ and retrojects the parts into Jesus' earthly life. In his (her?)¹⁹¹ arrangement, the Roman confession follows not the resurrection but Jesus' exemplary death (Mark 15:39), while the resurrection-ascension of Jesus takes place as the Transfiguration in Mark 9:1-8. According to Crossan, the original ending of Mark is the centurion's confession; Mark 16:1-8, the women's visit at the empty tomb is a later addition, which comes, interestingly, from Secret Mark, and actually alludes to the female relatives of the risen young man.¹⁹² (One could ask, with Ben Witherington, why canonical Mark would want to give such prominence to women, if the whole purpose of the canonical resurrection narratives is to justify and support male dominance in the early church.¹⁹³)

Crossan's reconstruction of the Cross Gospel is highly contentious and was comprehensively refuted by Raymond E. Brown as early as in 1987, in his

response to *Four Other Gospels*.¹⁹⁴ Brown points out the problematic aspects of Crossan's reconstruction, questions such as the fact that the Cross Gospel exhibits a total ignorance of Jewish customs - for example, the whole Jewish council, the scribes and the crowd spend the Sabbath at a sepulchre containing a corpse; Herod is a king who has the right to order an execution in Jerusalem etc.¹⁹⁵ - an ignorance quite unlikely for a group of "literate Galilean Christians"¹⁹⁶ who, according to Crossan, were the authors of the passion narrative. He also observes that Crossan oversimplifies matters by reducing the alternatives to either "historical recall or biblical prophecy", without entertaining the possibility that the early passion narratives "consisted of recalled happenings which were seen to match biblical prophecy".¹⁹⁷ In this respect it is enough to note the rather flat interpretation Crossan assigns to Paul's phrase "in accordance with the Scriptures" in 1 Corinthians. For Crossan, this phrase indicates that the traditions Paul refers to were in fact invented on the basis of prophetic exegesis. A more likely possibility is however, that Paul here stresses that in the events of Jesus' passion and resurrection "the story of Israel has come to its goal".¹⁹⁸ As far as Crossan's hypothetical Cross Gospel is concerned, D. Moody Smith's rhetorical question deserves consideration: "Is it thinkable that the tradition began with the legendary, the mythological, the anti-Jewish, and indeed the fantastic, and moved in the direction of the historically restrained and sober?"¹⁹⁹

These three examples illustrate the basic features of Crossan's treatment of the sources: his readiness to accept non-canonical material as more original, and his preference for the non-biographical, anthological collections of sayings like Q and Thomas over the narratives. The first aspect, the consistent preference for non-canonical sources, reflects a basic problem which plagues several facets of Crossan's reconstruction, his tendency to think in terms of conspiracy

theories. He assigns a great degree of creative freedom to the early Christians - "Jesus left behind thinkers not memorizers, disciples not reciters, people not parrots"²⁰⁰ - but this freedom mostly serves to distort an original, purer form of tradition. The second aspect, the emphasis on sayings collections reflects, on the one hand, a preference for a sapiential, non-apocalyptic Jesus, and on the other an old axiom of the Bultmann school that the earliest Jesus traditions had no biographical interest and that biographical elements were only added later by the evangelists who combined the Pauline kerygma with the non-biographical assemblages.²⁰¹ This axiom has been challenged in recent years, and it seems more likely, that "there has been a biographical element in the Jesus tradition from the beginning."²⁰² Furthermore, the possibility cannot be ruled out that it was Jesus' passion and resurrection which made his figure so uniquely significant that the author(s) of the sayings tradition wished to collect his sayings and "develop another aspect of him as teacher and man of wisdom".²⁰³ Harold W. Attridge draws attention to the fact that precious little can actually be known about the ideas and practices of the so-called Q community. The assumption of some Q scholars that silence is golden, that is, that Q Christians could not have been interested in eschatology, ritual or the role and the death of Jesus is in fact mistaken: silence in this case is highly ambiguous.²⁰⁴ Finally, Crossan's arrangement of the sources into chronological layers can be criticised by showing highly arbitrary divisions: N. T. Wright notes that the first and the second stratum consist of twenty years each, while the third forty. Thus, e.g. 81 C.E. belongs with 119 rather than 79.²⁰⁵

Multiple Independent Attestation

To the exclusion of all the other criteria Crossan only uses the criterion of multiple independent attestation, and that mostly in the first stratum. In this way

the very early complexes, like Kingdom and Children (1/4: first stratum, four independent attestations) may point to the earliest layer of sayings and consequently to the importance of the given themes in the teaching of Jesus. Quite often however, Crossan chooses to disregard complexes that have a very strong claim to authenticity given their early and multiple independent attestation. The treatment of the Lord's Prayer and the Last Supper traditions may serve as two - interrelated - examples.

The Lord's Prayer (1/2) occurs both in the "Sayings Gospel Q" (Luke 11:1-4/Matt 6:9-13) and in Didache. Nevertheless, for Crossan it is at most a summary of "themes and emphases from Jesus' own lifetime"²⁰⁶, but does not go back to Jesus, since it reflects the ritual activity of the early church. "I do not think that such a co-ordinated prayer was ever taught by [Jesus] to his followers."²⁰⁷ In his analysis of the Lord's Prayer, Crossan seeks to allay the suspicion that his rejection of the authenticity of the prayer is caused by the fact that it contains a future-oriented, apocalyptic petition: "there is nothing apocalyptic about the Lord's Prayer"²⁰⁸; rather, he stresses the "ritualistic" nature of the text, which serves the needs of a group that "starts to distinguish and even separate itself from the wider religious community".²⁰⁹ In other words, the Lord's Prayer in its present form does not fit Crossan's overall reconstruction of the Jesus movement as an inclusive and egalitarian group.

The same motive can be detected in Crossan's treatment of the Last Supper traditions. These, too, have an extremely good status chronologically and according to the number of attestations (1/4). The tradition about a ritualised common meal of remembrance, however, "does not derive from the historical Jesus and reflects, rather, the process of a Graeco-Roman formal meal".²¹⁰ It tells not only about the ritualisation of the meal, but also about the exclusivism of the twelve male

disciples, which contrasts with Jesus' practice of open commensality. The trajectory of the meal tradition develops from open commensality into a general eucharistic meal (evidenced in *Didache* 9-10) and finally into a specific passion remembrance.²¹¹ Again, the rejection of this very early tradition is the result of the influence of the overall hypothesis rather than the application of the method, although Crossan claims that his starting point is the earliest stratum of tradition which forms the basis of his working hypothesis.

In general, although Crossan's method seeks to be "as objective and quantitative as possible"²¹², there are serious inconsistencies in the application of his own criterion. The exclusive use of this one criterion can also be questioned, given the fact that "by historical accident, we happen to have some sources and not others"²¹³, and it is hard to know, in N. T. Wright's words, "...that a single on-off story might not be the pearl of great price for which one should sell all the lesser pearls of frequently repeated aphorisms".²¹⁴ Crossan is of course aware of this weakness; nevertheless, he regards multiple attestation as the only truly objective criterion, and thus the only one to be used in the positive reconstruction. He claims that "both ancient biblical law and modern journalistic ethics want at least two independent sources for something to stand investigation".²¹⁵ This methodological decision stands in marked contrast with J. P. Meier's stance, who thinks that we need "as many controls as possible over a difficult material",²¹⁶ which means that no criterion should be used mechanically and in isolation; "a convergence of different criteria is the best indicator of historicity".²¹⁷

Crossan's use of this method is inseparably tied to his judgements about the dating and independence of the sources. In many cases, his complexes are independently attested only because they appear in extracanonical sources to which Crossan assigns an unusually early date. Crossan's inventory and his chronological

strata are presented as starting points, but they seem much more to be conclusions. In his Semeia article, he declares his intention to test his initial total image of Jesus against the data of his inventory, but this process will inevitably prove circular if the inventory itself is the result of this prior total image.

The inconsistencies mentioned above reflect a deep-seated tension that characterises the whole reconstruction. On the one hand, Crossan professes to be a postmodernist who does not deal in "positivist simplicities" and is concerned "not with an unattainable objectivity but with an attainable honesty".²¹⁸ On the other, the inventory, the scientific stratigraphy and the apparent rigour of the method do give an impression of an almost positivist approach, although "...modernists have holes, and positivists have nests, but the Son of Postmodernism ought to have nowhere to lay his head."²¹⁹

J. P. Meier

Sources

Meier sees clearly that even during the seemingly preliminary phase of collecting and selecting the documents that will serve as a basis for the reconstruction, one is "already beginning to determine the lineaments of one's portrait of Jesus".²²⁰ Since the extra-canonical material needs to be given serious consideration even when one finally decides largely to ignore it, as Meier does, it is essential for any scholar to argue for his or her choice of the sources.

Within the New Testament, Meier thinks, we are basically thrown back on the gospels. Yet even the synoptics cannot be expected to yield information about the historical sequence of events in Jesus' life or even the religious or philosophical development of Jesus. A fundamental insight of form criticism, the fact that the

gospels are collections of pericopes often tied together by common forms, themes or keywords, is still valid for Meier. It is also quite clear that each of the synoptics has "rearranged the rosary beads on the rosary chain".²²¹ It follows, then, that it is impossible to write a biography of Jesus in the modern sense.

Contrary to many gospel critics, Meier refuses to ignore the Gospel of John as a possible source for historical Jesus research. He admits that John has rewritten the narratives for symbolic purposes as well as reformulated the sayings to fit his theological program. He also stresses, however, that such tendencies are not totally absent from the synoptics either. Furthermore, there are cases, like the nature of the Lord's Supper or the date of Jesus' death where John, rather than the Synoptics, may be historically correct. Instead of making a priori decisions, each case be judged on its own merits, Meier argues.²²² In John, Meier considers the narrative material much more useful than the sayings tradition, which has indeed undergone a massive reformulation from the Johannine perspective.²²³

As far as the history of the various strands of the synoptic tradition is concerned, perhaps the greatest problem for historical Jesus research is the question of the status and nature of the Q document. Meier does not argue against the existence of Q, since he thinks that there are reasonable grounds for affirming it. He does warn, however, that Q is a hypothesis, whose extent, wording, community, geography and stages of tradition and redaction cannot be ascertained. He criticises baroque theories about the development and theology of Q, quoting Wittgenstein's adage, "Whereof one does not know, thereof one must be silent".²²⁴ As far as the various strata proposed for the development of Q are concerned, he suspects that it is, paradoxically, the desire to find coherence in Q that leads to postulating separate layers; whereas, in Meier's view, Q is more of a "theological grab bag", in which sayings of strikingly different viewpoints are placed next to each other. For example,

in Luke 16:16-18, three sayings are joined together by the common theme of the law (v. 16 contrasts the past age of the law with the present age of Jesus, v.17 emphasises the eternal validity of the Mosaic law, while v. 18 is a blanket abrogation of an important institution of Mosaic law, divorce), but taken together they hardly represent a coherent theology. Instead, Meier likens Q to a ring book or a loose-leaf binder, where a number of different traditions circulating in the first Christian generation found their place next to each other instead of being the expression of one or more coherent community theologies. Most importantly, Meier claims that even if we could establish that a particular saying entered Q at a later stage, "that fact by itself would tell us nothing about whether the saying came from Jesus or was created by the early church".²²⁵ In general, the age of the sources is no guarantee of the authenticity of the traditions they contain. Also, the fact that Q lacks a passion narrative does not mean that the communities using it were ignorant of or uninterested in the passion of Jesus. The two communities that we know used Q, Matthew's and Luke's both knew and valued Mark's passion narrative.²²⁶

Discussing the few non-Christian sources that mention Jesus, Meier places special emphasis on the version of the *Testimonium Flavianum* that lacks the later Christian interpolations. In his discussion of Jesus' miracles, he draws attention to the way that Josephus unpacks the meaning of his designation of Jesus as *sophos anēr*: someone who was not only a teacher, but also a doer of startling deeds.²²⁷ Apart from Josephus, however, he regards the other Jewish sources like the Qumran documents, the Mishnah, the Tosefta and the Talmud as sources that enable us to appreciate the background out of which Jesus comes rather than sources containing independent reference to Jesus. If we try to use them as independent and direct witnesses to the Jesus of history, we ask the wrong question of a body of literature with its own valid concerns, Meier argues.²²⁸ Concerning the material found in the

extra-canonical literature, Meier does not share the enthusiasm of Crossan or the Jesus Seminar. He thinks that the four canonical gospels are "the only large documents containing significant blocks of material relevant for the quest of the historical Jesus". It is true, he admits, that if we are left with material gleaned from the canonical gospels alone, this corpus is "infuriating in its restrictions". Yet if this meagerness of data leads us to call upon dubious sources like the Gospel of Peter to broaden out our pool of sources, this will only broaden it out "from the difficult to the incredible".²²⁹ In a careful analysis, Meier shows that the Gospel of Peter exhibits knowledge of the canonical gospels, especially the Gospel of Matthew, and that Thomas, although it does contain material from a broad spectrum of different streams of Gospel tradition from Q, Mark, M, L and John, it also often reflects the redactional features of the canonical gospels.

Criteria

Volume 1 of *A Marginal Jew* contains perhaps the most thorough recent presentation of the criteria of authenticity. Meier makes very clear his reasons for using these criteria, despite the fact that most third quest scholars have largely abandoned them. He thinks that reconstructions that neglect the criteria all too often pick and choose from among the gospel stories in a haphazard way, and not infrequently what strikes an author as reasonable or plausible is therefore considered historical. Even when the validity of these rules is acknowledged in a general sense, they are left behind in the course of the actual reconstruction.²³⁰ Meier defines the criteria of historicity as rules or norms that are applied to the gospel material in order to arrive at a judgement. These criteria can only produce judgements that are more or less probable, not ones that are absolutely certain, yet considering that in historical Jesus research almost anything is possible, they do serve an important

purpose: with their help judgements can "pass from the merely possible to the really probable".²³¹

Despite the fact that form criticism and the new quest is generally thought to be the period when rigorous criteria were established and used, Meier notes how in many cases (e.g. in Bultmann's *History of the Synoptic Tradition*) "vital decisions on the historicity of words and deeds of Jesus were made with surprisingly little argumentation".²³² For Meier, it is essential to make clear on what grounds he makes his decisions so that the readers may also know on what grounds they agree or disagree.²³³ Meier knows how difficult it is to articulate and apply the criteria of historicity, and is not surprised that many scholars simply brush them aside. Yet he also knows that "every scholar is de facto operating with some method and criteria, however inchoate and unexamined".²³⁴ The importance of these criteria applied methodically to the data is that they may force critics to draw "conclusions [they] have not foreseen and perhaps do not desire".²³⁵ So criteria are necessary as controls over the difficult material and are not to be presented as a guarantee of the results of the quest.

A basic rule Meier always follows in his use of the criteria is that none of them is to be used alone, only in concert with other criteria. Nor can they be applied mechanically; different pericopes warrant the use of different configurations of criteria.

Meier distinguishes five primary and four secondary criteria. The five primary criteria are **embarrassment, dissimilarity, multiple attestation of sources and forms, coherence** and the criterion of **rejection and execution**. None is an infallible indicator of historicity. The criterion of embarrassment, for example, shows a conservative force at work in the gospel tradition: while a few facts that must have embarrassed the early Christians (e.g. Jesus' baptism by John,

or his strained relationship with his family) are retained in the tradition, several of the major problems the early communities had to face (e.g. circumcision, purity laws) never occur in the sayings of Jesus. Nevertheless, the criterion of embarrassment has serious limitations: we do not know the sensibilities of the first century well enough to be quite certain that what embarrasses us must also have embarrassed them. Meier also notes the problems dogging the use of the criterion of discontinuity, especially when it is used to establish a complete rupture with the religious history of those before and after Jesus. Instead, he argues for a consideration of the "constraints of history" Jesus had to take into account to successfully communicate with his contemporaries. Meier does not share, however, M. Hooker's scepticism about our lack of information concerning first century Judaism and Christianity. If we had to wait until we possessed a fulness of knowledge about these things, Meier says, we would have to "postpone all New Testament scholarship until the parousia".²³⁶ The criterion of multiple attestation of sources and forms is the criterion that Meier makes extensive use of, especially in his treatment of the miracle stories. He is aware, though, that it is not infallible; for example, Jesus' use of the word "Abba" occurs only once in the gospel tradition, yet few critics would reject it as unhistorical. The criterion of coherence can only be used to broaden an already established data base, but even then it should be used with caution. A total consistency of thinking is not to be expected of a person, especially if we take into account that ancient Semitic thought "delighted in paradoxical statements that held opposites in tension".²³⁷

The criterion of rejection and execution is different from the first four in that it is not designed to decide about the historicity of individual pieces in the tradition. Rather, it is concerned with the broader question of what historical words and deeds of Jesus can explain his trial and crucifixion as "King of the Jews". "A

Jesus whose words and deeds would not alienate people, especially powerful people, is not the historical Jesus."²³⁸

The secondary criteria, e.g. Aramaisms like antithetic parallelism or rhythmic speech, or stylistic features cannot as a rule decide about historicity. As Meier points out, Jesus did not have a monopoly on Aramaisms, neither would it have been unusual for his early followers to imitate his style. The criterion of vividness of narration is not very useful either: it can be an indication of an eyewitness report as well as the art of a skilled narrator.

Meier's Use of the Criteria: Miracle Stories

In the case of miracles, Meier claims, judgements of historicity are extremely hazardous. The best a critic can do is to distinguish stories that are entirely the creation of the early church and those that have some claim to go back to the time of Jesus' ministry. In view of the considerable difficulties involved, it is not surprising that most scholars either ignore the miracle tradition, or content themselves with general statements about Jesus' activity as a miracle-worker. A miracle-free Jesus has been "the holy grail sought after by many questers"²³⁹, yet a depiction of Jesus that disregards the miracles or argues that it was the missionary needs of the early communities that read them back to the miracle-free ministry of Jesus²⁴⁰ runs counter to the data found in the gospels. Of course, a catalogue of miracles collected from the gospels is no proof in itself, but the sheer number of miracle stories in all strands of tradition should at least awaken an initial, healthy suspicion that they could not have all been created by the early church out of whole cloth.

In the examination of the miracle tradition the criterion of multiple attestation and the criterion of coherence play a pivotal role. The criterion of multiple attestation of sources shows that the miracle tradition is represented in all the different Gospel traditions: Mark, Q, M, L and John. In Mark alone, 31% of the total material consists of blocks of miracle stories. It is true that not all types of miracles are represented in all strands of tradition; John, for example, contains no exorcism stories, but this is the result of John's special theological outlook: in John's realised eschatology it is the cross that is depicted as the grand cosmic exorcism, and the picture of Christ the eternal Word made flesh would sit uneasily with stories of Jesus engaging in battles with demons.²⁴¹

The criterion of multiple attestation of forms is also important for the analysis of miracle stories. The miracle narratives represent three major literary forms: stories of exorcism, stories of healing and the so-called nature miracles. Also, there are references to miracles in the sayings tradition, e.g. in Jesus' reply to John the Baptist's question or in the parable of the binding of the strong man.

The use of these two criteria naturally leads to the use of the criterion of coherence, when the question is how the miracle stories fit into the larger context of Jesus' ministry. According to the sayings material in Mark and Q, the interpretation of the miracles is found in their being a sign of God's eschatological triumph over Satan (in the case of exorcisms) and the sign of the advent of the time of Israel's salvation (cf. Jesus' reply to John).²⁴²

Thus there is a "neat, elegant, unforced fit" between the deeds and sayings of Jesus which creates a meaningful whole. If we add the possibility that Jesus' reputation as a miracle-worker must have contributed to his success to gain a large number of followers, as according to both the gospels and Josephus it was the powerful combination of miracles and teaching that was the cause of the attraction,

the coherence of the whole picture increases considerably. The criterion of discontinuity is not very useful in the case of the miracle tradition, since there are plenty of both Jewish and pagan parallels, although Meier maintains that some aspects of Jesus' miracles might have been distinctive.

The criterion of embarrassment also applies only to a limited degree. Stories which present Jesus in an ambiguous light (e.g. the accusation that he is in league with Beelzebul in Mark 3:20-30par) might be candidates, but it is very difficult to ascertain whether the early church considered them embarrassing or not.

The final primary criterion, that of rejection and execution can only yield meager results. The charges that are mentioned in the passion narratives lack any accusations connected to miracles. Some scholars, however, who consider "magic" as a type of religious banditry, maintain that it was a major cause of Jesus' arrest. Meier, however, is only prepared to assign miracles the role of "aggravating circumstances" leading to Jesus' death. He considers it a basic mistake to ask about one particular reason that lead to Jesus' execution. He thinks that it was a convergence of different reasons that contributed to the death of Jesus, among which miracle-working was probably not a major one.²⁴³

The secondary criteria offer only occasional support. Among them, the tendency of miracle stories to remain anonymous is more important: the fact that a miracle story names names may point to a historical remembrance.²⁴⁴

Meier builds an impressive case in favour of the global historicity of the miracle tradition, using primarily the criteria of multiple attestation and coherence and noting also that none of the other criteria runs counter to these two decisive ones. His conclusion is that the miracle tradition is more firmly supported by the criteria of historicity than a number of other well-known and readily accepted traditions; so, "if the miracle traditions from Jesus' public ministry were to be

rejected in toto as unhistorical, so should every Gospel tradition about him".²⁴⁵ He admits, however, that it is much easier to speak of the historicity of types of miracles than judging individual miracle stories. On the one hand, the form of these stories conformed to the conventions of the genre in the contemporary Graeco-Roman world, and on the other the symbolic function of the stories was either heightened or created in the course of transmission. A further problem is that the description of the particular illness in the story is often vague, to say nothing of the cultural and scientific gap that exists between the original storytellers and twentieth-century interpreters. In most cases, the details of the narrative are largely impenetrable, so our goal has to be a very limited one: we have to search for hints that the story either goes back to Jesus' life or was invented by the early church.²⁴⁶

It seems clear that if this were the only criterion by which the contributions are judged, the palm of victory should be handed to Meier, as the only one who consistently uses several criteria of historicity. The problem, however, with this "building-block approach" is that "with no macrohypothesis to guide him, he is committed by his method to use *all* the apparently historical blocks in his construction. It is only two-thirds complete, and the bottom line is that Jesus was 'a complex figure'.²⁴⁷ It remains to be seen how Meier will be able to integrate his findings within a plausible synthesis.

3. 5. Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to list a number of criteria by which the widely divergent contributions of the third quest may be evaluated. First, a few rules to do with the overall shape and style of the reconstructions were applied at a fairly general

level. Second, a few criteria were adapted to historical Jesus research from historiography in the wider sense. The relevance of these criteria to our subject-matter makes it clear that it is indeed possible to evaluate studies of the historical Jesus as historiography. Finally, the more "traditional" criteria of the historical-critical method were discussed as an indispensable set of tools that had been developed as an aid in wrestling with the special problems the gospel tradition confronts us with. Through the application of the various criteria it became obvious that none of the reconstructions discussed meets all or even most of them. This further underscores the need for a continuous dialogue among the participants of the quest.

1 D. H. Fisher: *Historians' Fallacies* p. 100.

2 Perhaps it is no accident that these two scholars published a book where they clarify "the meaning of Jesus" for themselves and their wider communities.

3 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 2.

4 M. J. Borg: *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1994 p. 2.

5 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 13.

6 *ibid.* p. 179.

7 Borg, *Meeting Jesus...* p. 78.

8 *ibid.* p. 136.

9 D. Moody Smith: "A Review of Marcus J. Borg: *Jesus: A New Vision*" in: *Foundations and Facets Forum* 5,4, December 1989, p. 71.

10 Marcus J. Borg: *Jesus: A New Vision* Harper&Row, San Francisco, 1987, p. 17.

11 Charlotte Allen: *The Search for a No-frills Jesus* *Athlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1996 online version, www.theatlantic.com/issues/96dec/jesus/jesus.htm.p. 21. She goes on to add: "However, those saints and mystics did not need a reconstructed Book of Q or a consortium of scholars in order to find the words of Jesus that directed them to give their possessions to the poor and to abandon all concern for their own fortunes. They found those words where they have always called attention to themselves - in their Bibles."

cf. Dale C. Allison's remark: "The non-Bultmannian circles....had produced, before Käsemann's oft-cited lecture, at least four crucial works of enduring value - Jeremias' *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, his *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu*, Dodd's *The Parables of the Kingdom*, and T. W. Manson's *The Sayings of Jesus*. ("The Secularised Jesus" online article, p.6.)

13 Larry W. Hurtado: "A Taxonomy of Recent Historical-Jesus Work" in: Arnal/Desjardins ed.: *Whose Historical Jesus?* p. 293.

14 Sean Freyne; "Galilean Questions to Crossan's Mediterranean Jesus" p. 90. in: Arnal/Desjardins ed.: *Whose Historical Jesus?*

15 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 58. This accusation is unfair to Harnack: in *What is Christianity* he makes a clear distinction between the Gospel and any social programme.

16 See J. D. G. Dunn: "Matthew 12:28/Luke 11:20 - A Word of Jesus?" in: W. Hultit Gloer ed.: *Eschatology and the New Testament*, Hendrickson: Peabody, Mass., 1988pp. 31-33.

17 William E. Arnal: "Making and Re-making the Jesus Sign: Contemporary Markings on the Body of Christ" in: Arnal/Desjardins ed.: *Whose Historical Jesus?* p. 316.

18 Richard B. Hays: "The Corrected Jesus " in: *Fist Things* 43 (May 1994) pp. 43-48.

19 Allison, *Millenarian...* p. 52.

20 Downing, *The Church and Jesus* p. 110.

21 see Koester and Robinson's *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (1971) According to Charlotte Allen, trajectory theories have a debatable underlying assumption, namely, that "each early Christian community read only a single text at any given time." Charlotte Allen: "The Search for a No-Frills Jesus" p. 14.

22 F. J. Van Beeck: "The Quest of the Historical..." p. 84.

23 See the analysis in David Rhoads and Sandra Roberts; "From Domination to Mutuality in *The Piano* and in the Gospel of Mark" in: Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz eds.: *Explorations in Theology and Film* Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1997 pp. 47-57.

24 J. D. Crossan: *The Birth of Christianity* HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1998 p. 415.

25 J. D. Crossan : *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991 pp. 58-67.

26 A. E. Harvey: A review of Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* *Journal of Theological Studies* 44, p. 226.

27 Crossan: *The Historical Jesus* p. 196.

28 *ibid.* p. 218.

29 *ibid.* 142-157.

30 E. P. Sanders: "Jesus in Historical Context" in: *Theology Today* 50, 1993, pp. 429-448.

31 *ibid.* p. 440.

32 *ibid.* p. 446.

33 *ibid.* p. 433.

34 *ibid.* p. 440.

35 E. P. Sanders: *The Historical Figure of Jesus* Penguin Press, London, 1993 p. 226.

36 *ibid.* pp. 220-221.

37 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 261.

38 *ibid.*

39 *ibid.* p. 259.

40 Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* p. 212

41 *ibid.* p. 236.

42 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* pp. 208-210.

43 Sanders' judgements are arguably too harsh at times. Ben F. Meyer argues, for example, that Sanders falsely attributes to Joachim Jeremias the view that Jesus offered salvation to the Jews only to be rejected. In Meyer, *Aims...* p. 451-462.

44 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 330.

45 *ibid.* p. 208.

46 Sanders: *Jesus and Judaism* p. 209.

47 I came across this term in a different context (in the introduction of *Jesus in Context* Chilton/Evans eds., Leiden, Brill 1997, p. 18.) but I think it may justifiably be used in relation to Sanders' work.

48 P. Alexander's review of Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism* in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38-39, 1987 p. 105.

49 *ibid.* p. 104.

50 J. D. G. Dunn's review of Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism* in *Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 37, 1986, p. 513.

51 *ibid.*

52 J. D. G. Dunn: "Pharisees, Sinners and Jesus" in: *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee* ed. J. Neusner, P. Borgen, E. S. Frerichs, and R. Horsley pp. 264-289.

53 *ibid.* p. 268.

54 *ibid.* p. 273.

55 *ibid.* p. 276.

56 Bruce Chilton's review of Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism* JBL 100, 1984, p. 537. (Also, in another essay, ("Jesus and the Repentance of E. P. Sanders" in: *Tyndale Bulletin* 39, 1988. pp. 1-18) Chilton points out that the term "hamartoloi" as used in the Septuagint corresponds to five different roots in the Masoretic text, only one of which can be equated with Sanders' "wicked", and the Gospel use of the term may well have the Aramaic "debtor" behind it, as several of Jesus' parables indicate.)

57 Dunn, "Pharisees, Sinners..." p. 277.

58 As Dale C. Allison argues convincingly in "Jesus and the Covenant: a Response to E. P. Sanders" in: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, 1987, pp. 72-73.

59 Chilton, "Jesus and the Repentance..." p. 12.

60 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 209.

61 Borg, *Conflict...* p. 71.

62 *ibid.* p. 141.

63 *ibid.* p. 142.

64 *ibid.* p. 80.

65 *ibid.* p. 82.

66 *ibid.* p. 84.

67 *ibid.* p. 135.

68 *ibid.* p. 94.

69 *ibid.* p. 98.

70 *ibid.* p. 119.

71 *ibid.* pp. 117-118.

72 *ibid.* p. 119.

73 *ibid.* p. 126.

74 *ibid.* p. 127.

75 *ibid.* p. 132.

76 *ibid.* p. 136.

77 *ibid.* p. 151.

78 *ibid.* p. 161.

79 *ibid.* p. 177.

80 *ibid.* p. 219.

81 Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* pp. 81-84.

82 *ibid.* p. 125.

83 *ibid.* p. 179.

84 *ibid.* p. 108.

85 *ibid.* p. 103.

86 Paula Fredriksen accuses Borg (and others) of this in "What You See is What You Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus" in: *Theology Today* 52, 1995 p. 96.: "...the old antithesis of law and grace has simply been replaced by the even more self-congratulatory antithesis of purity and compassion."

87 *ibid.* p. 96.

88 At this point, Wright offers his own speculative tradition-history: instead of the *invention* of material, what we have here is actually the *suppression* of material (about the conflict between Jesus and the priests) that did not fit post-70 needs. (*Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 436.)

89 Wright: *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 372.

90 *ibid.* p. 372.

91 *ibid.* p. 388.

92 *ibid.* p. 389.

93. Fredriksen, "What you see..." p. 97.

94 *ibid.*

95 Meier, *A Marginal Jew* Vol. 1. p. 173.

96 Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest* p. 58.

97 *ibid.* p. 63. Witherington remarks that we may just as well call Spartacus a Cynic because of what he opposed.

98 *ibid.* p. 89.

99 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 69.

100 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 340.

101 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 281.

102 Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* p. 25.

103 *ibid.* p. 45.

104 *ibid.* p. 47.

105 Witherington, *The Jesus Quest* p. 99.

106 *ibid.* p. 11.

107 *ibid.* p. 102.

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- 108 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 160.
- 109 *ibid.* p. 324. With the difference, of course, that while Josephus predicted Vespasian's rise to power, Jesus "offered his own new twist: he himself, and his people, would be vindicated when Jerusalem, having rejected his message of peace, chose war and suffered the consequences."
- 110 J. P. Meier: "Dividing Lines in Jesus Research Today: Through Dialectical Negation to a Positive Sketch" *Interpretation* 50, 1996 p. 361.
- 111 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 232.
- 112 Keck, "The Second Coming of the Liberal Jesus?" online p. 3.
- 113 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 604.
- 114 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 332.
- 115 *ibid.* p. 333.
- 116 Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* p. 264.
- 117 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, p. 326.
- 118 Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* p. 285.
- 119 E. P. Sanders: "The Search for Bedrock in the Jesus Material" in: *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* no. 7, 1983. pp. 74-86.
- 120 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 4.
- 121 *ibid.* p. 16.
- 122 E. P. Sanders: *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* SNTSMS 90, Cambridge, 1969
- 123 Sanders/Davies, *Studying...* pp. 316-322.
- 124 *ibid.* p. 304.
- 125 e.g. by Paula Fredriksen
- 126 Robert J. Miller: "Historical Method and the Deeds of Jesus" in: *Foundations and Facets Forum* 8, 1992, p. 7.
- 127 Alexander's review p. 105.
- 128 David Seeley: "Jesus' Temple Act" in: *CBQ* 55, 1993 p. 264 quoting Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism* p. 85. I am also indebted to Seeley for the Jesus ben Ananias example in this context. (p. 265.)
- 129 Evans: *Jesus in Context* p. 398.
- 130 Miller, p. 22.
- 131 Seeley, p. 264.
- 132 Fredriksen: "What you see..." pp. 75-97.
- 133 J. D. G. Dunn's review of Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism* p. 512.
- 134 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 156.
- 135 Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* p. 81.

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- 136 *ibid.* p. 82.
- 137 J. D. G. Dunn, "Matthew.." pp. 31-33.
- 138 Gerald Downing: "Words as Deeds and Deeds as Words" *Biblical Interpretation* 3, 1995, pp. 279-93.
- 139 Borg, *Conflict...* p. 2.
- 140 *ibid.* p. 22.
- 141 *ibid.* p. 23.
- 142 *ibid.* p. 24.
- 143 Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* p. 12.
- 144 *ibid.* p. 6.
- 145 *ibid.* p. 13.
- 146 *ibid.* p.. 12-14.
- 147 Marcus J. Borg: "Reflections on a Discipline" in: ed. Chilton/Evans: *Studying the Historical Jesus* p. 27.
- 148 Borg, *Conflict...* p. 249. (Though 'clear' and 'opaque' are notoriously subjective judgements.)
- 149 Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* note 30. p. 54.
- 150 D. Moody Smith's review p. 79.
- 151 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 87.
- 152 *ibid.* pp. 133-135.
- 153 N. T. Wright: *The New Testament...* pp. 135-136.
- 154 *ibid.* p. 99.
- 155 *ibid.* p. 131.
- 156 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 397.
- 157 Wright, *The New Testament...* p. 427.
- 158 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 87.
- 159 J. D. Crossan: "What Victory? What God? A Review Debate with N. T. Wright on *Jesus and the Victory of God*" in: *SJT* Vol. 50, 1997 p. 349.
- 160 N. T. Wright: "Doing Justice to Jesus: A Response to J. D. Crossan: What Victory? What God?" *SJT* Vol. 50 1997, p. 360.
- 161 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 87.
- 162 Clive Marsh: "Theological History? N. T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*" *JSNT* 69, 1998, p. 81.
- 163 J. D. G. Dunn's review of Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*, manuscript, 1997 p. 6.
- 164 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 479.
- 165 Marsh, "Theological...", p. 83.
- 166 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 459.

167 Maurice Casey: "Where Wright is Wrong: A Critical Review of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God" JSNT 69, 1998, p. 102.

168 Wright, *The New Testament*.. pp. 4330-34.

169 J. D. G. Dunn's review p. 4.

170 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* pp. 230-236.

171 *ibid.* p. 232.

172 *ibid.* p. 237.

173 J. D. G. Dunn's review p. 5.

174 J. D. Crossan in Hershel Shanks ed.: *The Search for Jesus: Modern Scholarship Looks at the Gospels* Biblical Archaeology Society, Washington D.C., 1994 p. 129.

175 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 5.

176 Wright's response to C. Marsh JSNT 69, 1998 p. 107.

177 J. D. Crossan: "Divine Immediacy and Human Immediacy: Towards a New First Principle in Historical Jesus Research" in: *Semeia* 44, 1989 p. 122.

178 J. D. Crossan : *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* Polebridge Press, Sonoma, Calif. 1992 and *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* Harper&Row, San Francisco, 1988

179 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 229. quoting Kloppenborg

180 Crossan, "Divine..." p. 124.

181 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 229.

182 *ibid.* p. 383.

183 Marcus Bockmuehl: *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994 note 14. p. 181.

184 Wright , *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 49.

185 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* p. 330.

186 *ibid.* p. 329.

187 *ibid.* p. 372.

188 *ibid.* p. 375.

189 *ibid.*p. 386.

190 *ibid.* p. 389.

191 Crossan toys with the idea, based on the story of the unnamed woman in Mark 14:3-9 that "...one could make a case for Mark-as-a-woman obliquely signing her manuscript by that sentence at 14:9.." p. 416. in *The Historical Jesus*

192 *ibid.* p. 415.

193 Witherington, *The Jesus Quest* note 114. p. 267.

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Chapter 4.

Eschatology

4.1. Introduction

The most heated controversy in current historical Jesus research has been generated by the problem of eschatology. For a variety of reasons, apocalyptic, eschatology and the questions concerning the nature of the eschatological views Jesus might have held have become burning issues within the quest. The contributors seem to have a lot at stake arguing their respective positions, yet in many cases they apparently operate with different definitions of the terms 'eschatology' and apocalyptic'. This terminological confusion is compounded by the divergent value judgements the authors attach to these phenomena.

Despite – or due to – the controversial nature of this topic there is, as a rule, no real conversation between representatives of the opposing views. A reviewer called this the 'ships in the night' phenomenon¹, which at times manifests itself in calling into question the intellectual integrity of scholars with opinions contrary to one's own. For example, a standard accusation aimed at those who question the eschatological consensus is that they "try to salvage a Jesus to whom moderns can relate, who does not bear the stigma of a mistaken eschatological hope".² Praising Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer for their groundbreaking work on Jesus' eschatology, Helmut Koester asserts: "their worldview did not include an eschatological orientation either, but they acknowledged that Jesus' mythical and eschatological worldview was an utterly strange feature that left them bewildered and did not allow the development of an image of Jesus that would fit their categories...but Albert Schweitzer had enough courage and honesty to design his personal and moral commitment without the blessings of the Jesus of history."³ In

other words, those that would rather 'design' their own moral and religious commitment with some help from the Jesus of history, are cowardly and/or dishonest. On the other hand, scholars who wish to reassert Jesus' strong ties to apocalyptic eschatology are accused of implicating him in a fantasy born of sectarian desire, violence, vindictiveness, escapism and an abdication of historical responsibility. It must be noted here that there seems to be a strong desire on the part of the advocates of the non-eschatological Jesus to disassociate Jesus from contemporary American religious groups with an apocalyptic outlook. Marcus Borg, for example, argues that "people today who believe that the end is near sound very different from what I hear in the Jesus tradition considered as a whole".⁴ This polemic, which is especially emphatic among members of the Jesus Seminar, can at times undoubtedly influence the arguments and results of their scholarly work. This corrective emphasis is perhaps the most obvious in the work of Burton Mack, who considers the apocalyptic imagination "both fantastic and dangerous, leading away from an engagement with the ordinary, privileging the spectacular and providing an epic scenario within which destructive social and political decisions can be justified".⁵ Thus for Mack, historical scholarship has immediate relevance: his non-apocalyptic, countercultural, Cynic-like Jesus challenges contemporary 'apocalyptic' Christianity "to join the human race"⁶.

This obvious and sometimes admitted quest for immediate contemporary relevance does not, however, in and of itself invalidate the findings of scholars with this kind of personal bias. Neither does it mean that the eschatological camp is completely free from presuppositions. T. F. Glasson, in his essay on Albert Schweitzer's reconstruction of the apocalyptic Jesus, already noted the curious principle held by Schweitzer as well as his followers: "when alternative views are open, the more unpalatable must be the true one".⁷ In other words, the mere fact that the apocalyptic Jesus is alien to modern sensibilities, in itself guarantees the

scientific objectivity of this model. One of the corollaries of this view is that "the non-apocalyptic Jesus, since congenial, is therefore not historical".⁸ Moreover, the apocalyptic image of Jesus may also serve interests that are not exclusively scholarly. William E. Arnal draws attention to "the conservative impulse to avoid (at all costs, even at the cost of an alien Jesus) the characterisation of Jesus as a radical with any social implications".⁹ John Howard Yoder in his *The Politics of Jesus* criticises the way in which Schweitzer's designation of Jesus' ethical teaching as an ethic for an "Interim" has served as an excuse for modern theologies to construct ethical systems without reference to Jesus.¹⁰

A more positive reason for the desire to affirm the eschatological portrait of Jesus is to emphasise Jesus' importance for religion. Sean Freyne expresses this reason with exceptional openness and clarity: "my insistence on the eschatological nature of Jesus' career arises from my concern regarding the claims to ultimacy that Christian faith makes in terms of Jesus. In the absence of an eschatological dimension to Jesus' utterances, it would be impossible to see how any Christological claims could be grounded in his earthly life, which is precisely the issue that gave rise to the quest for the historical Jesus in the first place as both an ecclesial and an academic exercise."¹¹

Even if it is doubtful whether the weakening of the eschatological consensus can indeed be called a 'Copernican paradigm shift'¹², there seems to be a definite moving away from an exclusively futurist eschatology within the third quest. One of the reasons for this change is the unsatisfactoriness of Albert Schweitzer's reconstruction of Jesus' ministry. While Schweitzer's criticism of the 19th century liberal lives of Jesus has stood the test of time, his so-called 'consistent eschatological' model based on the mission discourse in Matt. 10: 5-42 (Jesus expected the imminent coming of the Son of man; he expected his disciples to suffer the eschatological tribulations while on their mission; when both these expectations

failed to be fulfilled, he resolved to suffer these tribulations himself in an attempt to force God to bring in the kingdom) has proved to be, in J. P. Meier's words, a "monumental blunder". If so, it might also be the case that Schweitzer was "wrong to diagnose dominical ethic as only a sort of 'martial law' prelude to a final event which precluded any room for and concern with human doing".¹³

T. F. Glasson has shown that Schweitzer's presentation of apocalyptic eschatology as the dominant Jewish view in Jesus' time which referred to a cosmic catastrophe ushering in a supernatural and superethical kingdom was an oversimplification. "The apocalyptic writings to which Schweitzer appealed expressed variety rather than uniformity."¹⁴ There was no general view 'in the air' that would have been taken for granted by Jesus and his audience. This oversimplification might have been the result of the fact that Johannes Weiss' more nuanced view was "pushed in the calendrical direction by Schweitzer".¹⁵ As far as Jesus' own application of the allegedly all-pervasive apocalyptic view in his own ministry is concerned, it ultimately resulted in a mistaken expectation and abject failure. In the first edition of his book Schweitzer himself admits: "Instead of renewing eschatology, Jesus has destroyed it." (This remark is missing from all the subsequent editions.)¹⁶

Schweitzer rightfully criticised the 19th century liberal lives of Jesus for simply mirroring the optimism and belief in progress of their own era. The same objection, however, could equally be applied to the apocalyptic view as well: its dramatic interpretation of Jesus' ministry reflected the darkening horizon of the years immediately preceding the first world war. Its later success in the aftermath of the war might also have been the result of the perception that it corresponded to reality more closely than the earlier view.¹⁷ Also, Schweitzer's presentation of Jesus as a solitary, misguided yet heroic figure seems to have strong affinities with Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy.

For scholars dissatisfied with the bleak Schweitzerian picture, one possible option was a reinterpretation of the temporal aspect of eschatology as a way of preserving the relevance of Jesus' proclamation. The most influential attempt in this direction was Rudolf Bultmann's, who translated Jesus' apocalyptic language in terms of 'eschatological existence'. "The real significance of the 'Kingdom of God' for the message of Jesus does not in any sense depend upon the dramatic events attending its coming, nor on any circumstances which the imagination can conceive. It interests him not at all as a describable state of existence, but rather as the transcendent event."¹⁸ Not only is this picture totally devoid of any contact between Jesus and his social world in first-century Jewish Palestine, its relevance also depends to a large extent on Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. With the waning of the influence of existentialism, however, it became clear that this solution was unsatisfactory. Despite the undeniable existential import of Jesus' teachings, a call to 'authentic existence' can hardly be the equivalent of a first-century belief that God was about to judge the world.

4. 2. The Non-Eschatological Portraits

4.2.1. Marcus J. Borg

Marcus Borg has not only championed a non-eschatological interpretation of Jesus' teaching in his own books, but he is also a chronicler of what he regards as an erosion of the previous scholarly consensus that portrayed Jesus as an eschatological prophet with an apocalyptic scenario. Borg is aware of both the terminological confusion surrounding the issue of Jesus' eschatology and the fact that the

movement away from the apocalyptic or eschatological portrait is not unanimously accepted in historical Jesus research as a complete 'pendulum swing'.

He derives the terminological ambiguity of the expression 'eschatology' from its history, which can be characterized as a 'blurring and broadening of meaning' since the word first entered theological discourse in the 17th century, originally with an ahistorical and atemporal reference to 'the ultimate post-death fate of individuals'. From Reimarus onwards this understanding gave way to an emphasis on chronological futurity and divine intervention either involving the end of the space-time world (molecular eschatology) or the establishment of a new world on earth by a supernatural, world-changing event (as in the Weiss/Schweitzer model). With the various reinterpretations of Schweitzer's scheme, the meaning of the term eschatology has broadened considerably to denote either an expression of 'authentic existence' (Bultmann), a 'shattering of a conceptual-linguistic world' (Perrin), or simply a concern with the future or any world-changing event (like the tearing down of the Berlin wall).¹⁹

Since for Borg this broadening of meaning renders the term and its application to Jesus 'virtually meaningless', he uses eschatology in the more narrow sense, which includes chronological futurity and the expectation of a dramatic divine intervention resulting in a radically new state of affairs that entails the vindication of the people of God.²⁰ He asserts that if in a given reconstruction this expectation is not central for Jesus, then the image of Jesus can justifiably be called non-eschatological.²¹

The first programmatic summary of Borg's position can be found in his essay "An Orthodoxy Reconsidered: the 'End-of-the-World' Jesus"²². His argument has three major elements: the appearance of new data and the use of new, interdisciplinary methods in the study of Jesus' socio-cultural milieu, the 'virtual

disappearance' of the exegetical base for the 'end-of-the-world Jesus', and the more satisfactory *Gestalt* of Jesus that emerges from the non-eschatological reconstruction.²³

Drawing on Gerd Theissen's sociological studies about the Jesus movement as the 'peace party' and the 'inclusive party' in Palestine, Borg reconstructs Jesus' historical intention as the transformation of Israel, rather than the preparation of a community for the end.²⁴ The kinds of concerns present in the ministry of Jesus "suggest a continuing historical community rather than the abolition of historical community".²⁵

Borg contends that the textual base of the 'orthodox' scholarly position that interprets the atmosphere of crisis in the Synoptics as caused by the approach of the end of the world, has been seriously undermined in recent years. The 'coming Son of man' sayings turned out to be the product of Christian reflection and interpretation; the major part of the so-called Synoptic threat-tradition²⁶ can be interpreted as referring to a contingent historical catastrophe and even the remaining few threats that speak of a final judgment lack the element of imminence.²⁷ This indicates that even if Jesus did believe in a definitive end of history with the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, he did not perceive this final crisis as imminent. It is a prophetic rather than an apocalyptic understanding of Israel's crisis that characterizes Jesus' ministry.

Although Borg admits that Sanders' principle concerning the position of Jesus the eschatological prophet as the middle term between John the Baptist, the prophet of imminent judgement, and the early Christians expecting the imminent return of Christ is "a natural and strong inference"²⁸, he maintains that the links in both cases can be interpreted differently.

On the one hand, he notes the possibility of a non-eschatological interpretation of John the Baptist (after all, Josephus does not present John as an eschatological prophet), although, wisely, Borg himself does not try to argue this position. His other objection to Sanders' view is more serious: there is an undeniable difference in emphasis between John the Baptist, the prophet of imminent judgment and Jesus, in whose proclamation the theme of judgment, though present, is much more muted.²⁹

As far as the eschatological orientation of the early Christians is concerned, Borg thinks that the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus is a post-Easter development that appeared precisely as a result of the resurrection, which in Jewish thought was seen as an end-time event.³⁰ (Borg does not seem to notice that this argument can only prove that the eschatology of the early community was significantly affected by the resurrection experience, but not that an essentially non-eschatological message was changed into an imminent eschatological one as a result of Easter.) Borg also emphasizes that the Church did not expect the end of the world in an abstract way: "they expected specifically the imminent return of Christ",³¹ and this specific expectation is more plausible as the direct result of Easter than a conviction obtained from the preaching of Jesus. As far as the 'tired cliché' of the so-called 'delay of the Parousia' is concerned, Borg suggests that although the problem was registered by the early church, it was not a central theological question for it.³²

An important plank in the non-eschatological thesis and one that Borg emphasizes in his more recent writings is the claim that the image or *Gestalt* of Jesus as an eschatological prophet is difficult to reconcile with the broad stream of subversive wisdom material found especially in the Gospel of Thomas and Q. In contrast to others in this camp, Borg is not convinced of the advisability of dividing Q

into various layers. He is content merely with emphasizing that Jesus wisdom sayings disclose a perspective or mentality that can only be combined with imminent eschatology if "they are reduced to abstract categories without much specific content"³³, but they are very unlikely as an actual combination. This argument could only bear weight if Borg could demonstrate that there is no first century document in which wisdom and apocalyptic motifs are combined, or even more pertinently, that the gospel tradition does not contain passages where the two perspectives are intertwined. Otherwise his objection seems to refer more to a strongly perceived difference between *contemporary* apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic strands of Christianity.³⁴ It is, in fact, possible to find examples *within the Synoptic Gospels* that successfully combine the two perspectives. One of these, with a strong claim to authenticity, is the pericope on anxieties, in which a typically sapiential 'qual wahomer' argumentation is grounded in an eschatological vision and leads to an eschatological admonition: "Seek first the Kingdom..."³⁵ It has even been suggested that one of the hallmarks of Jesus' 'very own speech' was this merger of "wisdom reflection and imminent kingdom proclamation which constitutes the argument against anxieties".³⁶

As far as the kingdom-language of the gospel tradition is concerned, Borg considers the three major Markan "imminent-coming" passages, Mark 1:15, 9:1 and chapter 13 to be all of a piece and all bearing the marks of an intensification of eschatological expectation triggered either by the Jewish War or an earlier historical conflict.³⁷ Apart from these, the kingdom appears in the Synoptic gospels as 'the *dynamis* of God' (Matt. 12:28/Luke 11:20), the 'presence of God' (Luke 17:20), 'life under the kingship of God' or 'an ideal state of affairs' (the messianic banquet).³⁸ Even if Jesus was concerned with the future, it was not the imminent future, and it entailed a contingent historical judgment on the ruling elite. Borg

argues that the sayings that urge a hasty evacuation at the time of the judgment (Luke 17:31 and Mark 13: 14-16) would not make sense if they referred to the end of human history. So the urgency permeating the Jesus tradition derives partly from the warning of the social prophet of a coming catastrophe and partly from the seriousness of the wisdom teacher who offers a choice between the way of life and the way of death.³⁹

Perhaps it is important to note at this point the subtle but perceptible shift of emphasis in Borg's views on the eschatology of Jesus. In his first book, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (1984) Borg presents Jesus primarily as the leader of a renewal movement whose primary concern is "the purpose, structure and destiny of the historical community of Israel" and he castigates Rudolf Bultmann for dehistoricizing the New Testament⁴⁰. In his subsequent Jesus-books, *Jesus: A New Vision* (1987) and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (1994) this Israel-centered picture gives way to the more universal, ahistorical picture of the wisdom teacher subverting the dominant society or conventional wisdom in general. The lessening of emphasis on Israel as a historical community seems to entail almost inevitably a corresponding shift towards an unequivocally non-eschatological image of Jesus.

4.2.2. J. D. Crossan

In *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* Crossan provides a threefold definition of apocalypticism. At the 'macrocosmic' level, it is a response to a profound attack on cultural integrity. In anthropology this kind of response is called millennialism, which can be understood as a "fantasy of salvation, which must be collective, terrestrial, imminent and total"⁴¹. At the 'mesocosmic'

level, the level of first century CE Palestinian history it appears as "the world of retainer revolt from scribalism to activism"⁴² and can in fact be identified as Josephus' 'fourth philosophy'. Adherents of apocalypticism expect divine violence to "solve a socio-cultural problem already beyond human redress".⁴³ Therefore it involves the expectation of a future action of God which is visible and tangible to all. According to Crossan, a distinction should be made between the apocalypticism thus defined and eschatology, which is a wider, more generic term and simply means world-negation. "All apocalyptic is eschatology but not all eschatology is apocalyptic."⁴⁴ In this way, a sapiential Jesus can also be seen as eschatological, all the more so, since wisdom and apocalyptic are "twin modes of handling an unacceptable present": the sapiential mode by going backward into the "past and lost Eden" and apocalyptic by "going forward into "the future and imminent heaven".⁴⁵ According to Crossan, both these possibilities were present in the Judaism of Jesus' day, just as they were present almost from the beginning in the Christian tradition. It is noteworthy, though, that the only examples of sapiential eschatology that Crossan cites are Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon. Since these are representatives of Diaspora Judaism, they are not very likely candidates for exercising a strong influence in Jewish Palestine.

Crossan creates a fourfold typology of the Kingdom of God in Jewish usage contemporary with Jesus: thematically the apocalyptic and sapiential types; according to class distinction the retainer and peasant types.⁴⁶ Rebellious retainers are responsible for the written apocalypses; while performed apocalyptic is enacted by the millennial prophets. The sapiential kingdom is at the same time the ethical kingdom, a "present ethical realm" represented in the thought of Philo or the Wisdom of Solomon.⁴⁷ Of course, these writings are the product of retainers, so what would the sapiential kingdom entail for peasants? It is at this point that Jesus enters the typology: "it is necessary to locate Jesus in the quadrant formed by sapiential and

peasant", since he proclaims and performs "the kingdom of the here and now of the nobodies and the destitute".⁴⁸

The sharp contrast Crossan creates between apocalyptic and some forms of eschatology is questionable; to define eschatology simply as world-negation makes the term too broad and too narrow at the same time. Too broad, since it subsumes even Gnosticism and too narrow because the various forms of eschatology usually emphasize the aspect of world transformation and not simply world-negation.

How did Jesus arrive at this sapiential/ethical understanding of the Kingdom? That he originally accepted John the Baptist's apocalyptic message is clear from the fact of his baptism as well as the very early "Into the Desert" complex (1/3: earliest layer, three independent attestations). Later on, however, Jesus changed his mind, as can be seen in the complex "Greater than John" where he emphatically contrasts John with a member of the Kingdom. At this point Jesus no longer thought apocalyptic adequate to express his own distinctive vision.

There are in fact several serious problems with this reconstruction. Firstly, Jesus' saying about the smallest member of the Kingdom being greater than John by no means expresses a denigration of John. On the contrary: it is exactly Jesus' high estimation of John that serves to emphasize the even greater value of being in the Kingdom. Secondly, there is no reason to suppose that there is a time lag between the two occasions even within Crossan's system of classification: he places both the "Into the Desert" complex and the "Greater than John" one in the first stratum, and there is no indication of any before and after in his inventory unless, of course, he considers the time indications in the gospels a reliable guide.

Crossan is evidently convinced that it is only the presence of the coming Son of man sayings in the gospels that create the picture of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet and once they are eliminated (despite their excellent status as 1/6), the rest of the material, including the kingdom sayings can be interpreted sapientially. The

Kingdom of God refers to "people under divine rule", as the complex "Kingdom and Children" (1/4) demonstrates.⁴⁹ The "strange constellation of metaphors" in the kingdom parables of the mustard seed and the leaven convey the dangerous and subversive nature of the kingdom. Moreover, the parable of the mustard seed even burlesques the apocalyptic expectations expressed by the symbol of the cedar-tree.⁵⁰ The petitions of the Lord's Prayer reflect the radical ethos of the sapiential kingdom, as, for example, the erasure of monetary debts. The saying against anxieties is also a correction of apocalyptic notions: reassurance comes not from knowing the hidden mysteries of the past and present but from watching nature's rhythm in the here and now.⁵¹

The most important aspect of the present kingdom is that it is *performed*: it is at hand "not in the sense of promise but of presence and its power is made visible in the commonality of shared miracle and shared meal".⁵² Also, the kingdom is primarily a way of life: people by watching Jesus can learn to imitate him and thus "bring in the kingdom".⁵³

How did this always-available present kingdom become the imminent apocalyptic kingdom? At this point Crossan is forced to invoke a complicated theory concerning the development of early Christianity. He reconstructs the history of the early movement in terms of a power struggle for authority. 'Thomas Christianity', which was polemically antiapocalyptic, viewed the kingdom as "an internal gift and cosmic presence". 'Pauline Christianity', on the other hand, believed that the end of the world has already begun (1 Cor. 15: 12-20), the "Titanic has already hit the iceberg", and Paul's mission was "to wake the cabins as far and wide as possible while God gives time".⁵⁴ While for Pauline Christianity it is the cross and resurrection of Jesus that is the basis of faith, the third strand, 'Q Christianity' shows no interest in these events and sees Jesus as someone "living according to Wisdom and empowering others to do so, then, now and always". Q Christianity uses apocalyptic

only to threaten those who reject its message. At this point Crossan employs Kloppenborg's theory about the layering of Q: Q₁ represents an "open and hopeful lifestyle and missionary activity", while Q₂ is "dark and defensive, threatening dire apocalyptic vengeance against 'this generation'".⁵⁵ Crossan, however, is careful not to equate the outlook of Q₁ with a non-eschatological orientation. Like Cynicism, he says, Q₁ is an expression of that "universal philosophy of eschatology or world-negation, one of the great and fundamental options of the human spirit".⁵⁶ Finally, the 'exegetical Christianity' of Jesus' non-peasant followers employed its 'hermeneutical gymnastics' to create the passion narratives out of Old Testament prophecies. This brand of Christianity was also responsible for the creation of a large amount of the accounts of Jesus' deeds as well.⁵⁷

It is easy to see how this classification serves to underline Crossan's basic picture of the sapiential Jesus. First of all, by positing Q₁ as a repository of traditions that express a sapiential eschatology, he not only exonerates Jesus from apocalyptic eschatology, he even exonerates eschatology from any association with apocalyptic and its dark connotations of "divine ethnic cleansing".⁵⁸ Secondly, by designating 'exegetical Christianity' as the creator of the passion narratives, he is relieved of the necessity of needing to explain how his Jesus, "a literary aesthete who toyed with first century deconstructionism"⁵⁹ was executed as King of the Jews. A further bonus of this theory is that since the narratives about the deeds of Jesus are also the creation of the early church ('exegetical Christianity'), the aspects of Jesus' ministry that point most clearly to some form of apocalyptic eschatology are also relegated to a later period.

In *The Birth of Christianity* Crossan further clarifies his definitions of eschatology and apocalyptic. He takes eschatology as the "genus-term" that subsumes different subgroups, such as future eschatology, realised eschatology, apocalyptic eschatology etc. Eschatology is fundamentally world-negation that

indicates "a vision and/or program that is radical, counter-cultural, utopian"⁶⁰.

Crossan differentiates between the secondary apocalyptic eschatology of Q where the apocalyptic element is peripheral from the primary apocalyptic eschatology of Mark and Paul, where it is primary. In the first case, ethical action is commanded quite independently from the prediction of the end, while in the other it is commanded in view of the imminent end. The original impulse that preceded Thomas' esoteric ascetical eschatology as well as apocalyptic eschatology is "ethical eschatology": a "personal and individual ending of one's world", a life of nonviolent resistance to structural evil.⁶¹

Quite apart from the inherent improbability of this all too complete picture, it is striking how both Borg and Crossan seem to hold quite outdated views about the nature and function of apocalyptic language itself. It is as if their instinctive horror of anything apocalyptic kept them from examining the phenomenon itself beyond the clichéd generalizations they both employ. In Richard Horsley's words, they both seem to be "battling against the modern construct of 'apocalypticism' rather than a viewpoint identifiable in any particular ancient Jewish text or in the Gospel of Mark". This abstraction, then, is contrasted with 'sapiential', understood as a separate tradition of thought and literature. According to Horsley, there is no basis for this dichotomy in the texts, and it makes even less sense to view these constructs "as dichotomous cultural movements dominant in late second temple Palestine."⁶²

An obvious reason for this overemphasis on the contrast between apocalyptic and sapiential modes of thought is its contemporary relevance within the American culture war in view of the perceived danger of the violence of apocalyptic thinking in both religion and politics as well as the perception, especially evident in Borg, that apocalyptic thinking leads to quietism. A subtler but no less important motivation might be the widespread disillusionment of academic radicals with

Marxism, the non-religious apocalyptic eschatology *par excellence*. 'Sapiential eschatology' with its emphasis on non-violent resistance and the availability of redemption in the here and now seems for many the only viable alternative. That Crossan's non-eschatological Jesus answers this need for a non-violent and present kingdom is clearly seen in the words of a political theologian in dialogue with Crossan:

"In secular and religious theodicies which count on the victory of some future generation, those who do not live to experience this future, those whose lives are cut short by political assassins and death squads, and those who lived diminished lives when even the hope for liberation was not available to redefine one's identity, stand mute before a walled kingdom. We need a theory of liberation that recognizes that each person, however diminished in thought by systemic oppression, has utter access to the utterly available Kingdom of God..... Present and future in the eschatological categories of the Christian tradition fall prey to the same dualism that infects other theological relationships."⁶³

4.3. The Eschatological Portraits

4.3.1. E. P. Sanders

In his first Jesus book, *Jesus and Judaism* Sanders places his reconstruction of the historical Jesus within the framework of Jewish restoration eschatology. He argues that the constellation of three themes in the gospel tradition: the sayings about and the action in the temple, the choice of twelve disciples and the context of Jesus' mission between John the Baptist and Paul settles the matter in broad terms even before a detailed examination of the sayings material. Since the meaning of the

individual sayings depends to a great extent on their context, it is advisable to establish the general framework first and examine the particulars in the light of that framework.⁶⁴

Sanders notes that although the terms 'apocalyptic' and 'eschatology', because of the long-standing definition of apocalyptic as including an urgent expectation, have often been used interchangeably, apocalyptic does not necessarily entail an imminent expectation of the end.⁶⁵ Therefore, he avoids the term 'apocalyptic' and only uses 'eschatology', "to refer to the expectation of an imminent end of the current order".⁶⁶

The nuances of the meaning of Jesus' eschatology and kingdom-language, Sanders argues, cannot be established by a careful exegesis of individual passages. The synoptic gospels are different in this respect from the letters of Paul, whose nuances can be discovered by paying attention to the immediate literary context of the arguments. In the gospels, the original context of an utterance is not always recoverable from the literary context.⁶⁷ Moreover, Jesus' use of the phrase 'Kingdom of God' carries a wide range of meaning; it might at times even have a different referent. Sanders thinks that when Jesus talks about the presence of the Kingdom, he uses the expression in the sense of "the power of God at work in the world", but this meaning is somewhat different from the sense in which the Kingdom of God will come and all the powers opposed to God will be eliminated.⁶⁸ As far as the future referent of Jesus' kingdom-language is concerned, Sanders admits that there is a tension between sayings predicting a future judgment by a heavenly figure and his angels (e.g. Matt. 16:27 par) and sayings that assign judgment to the disciples in the coming Kingdom. We cannot know whether Jesus and his contemporaries perceived this apparent contradiction between a future event involving a cosmic drama and a future event involving a social order as a contradiction. What seems certain, however, is that they could not have viewed the

tension between the *present* and the *future* in Jesus' message in terms of a tension within individual human experience.⁶⁹

Since the examination of the sayings cannot in itself help us decide about the relative weight given to the present or the future Kingdom, Sanders offers a number of *facts* that tilt the balance in favour of an imminent future Kingdom. The most important of these is Jesus' action in the Temple, a prophetic demonstration of symbolic destruction intended to point towards God's coming act of redemption and restoration. It must be noted, however, that Jesus' temple action can only be interpreted as referring to God's rebuilding of the Temple *if* it is placed within the framework of Jewish restoration eschatology.⁷⁰ Sanders himself is aware of this apparent weakness of his argument: "the Temple incident, devoid of context, could mean a negative position towards the central institution of Israel, or a positive one".⁷¹ Placed in the context of John the Baptist and the early church on the one hand and in the context of Jesus' other symbolic actions (the entry into Jerusalem, indicating Jesus' claim to be king of Israel, the final supper symbolizing the joys of the messianic age, the choice of the twelve), however, "we are compelled *by context* to take the evidence about the temple in a positive way".⁷² Moreover, Sanders argues, the behaviour of the early Christians indicates the character of the community as a "realized Jewish eschatological movement admitting Gentiles".⁷³

Sanders is aware of the tension between the community-centered nature of Jesus' symbolic gestures and the individual orientation of much of the sayings. He offers the tentative solution that Jesus may have viewed himself as "supplementing and thus completing John the Baptist's work". Whereas John the Baptist preached national repentance in view of the coming judgment, Jesus offered inclusion in the Kingdom to "the most obvious outsiders, the wicked, if they heeded his call".⁷⁴ In Jesus' proclamation the note of threat and impending doom is much

less emphatic, and it is placed in the context of "promise to the poor, the despised, the weak".⁷⁵

Tackling the problem whether the promise of Israel's restoration was a purely this-worldly or transcendent hope, Sanders offers a finely balanced analysis whose conclusion is that Jesus might have expected an otherworldly-earthly kingdom that has certain analogies to the present order (the disciples will judge the twelve tribes), but which is not the natural outworking of a social renewal (the restoration of the twelve tribes requires a divine miracle). It is important to emphasize that Sanders does not try to assimilate Jesus into the category of eschatological leadership prophets like Theudas or the Egyptian who promised eschatological miracles to validate their claims. Jesus' miracles are "not put forward to substantiate his claim".⁷⁶

The otherworldly-earthly expectations might have subsequently been transformed into otherworldly-heavenly ones by the disciples' resurrection experiences. Still, the fact that they defined these experiences using the eschatological notion of resurrection indicates that they must have thought in terms of a future Kingdom already in Jesus' lifetime. (Sanders does not deny a 'two-stage' eschatology to Jesus involving both types of expectations, yet neither does he play down the shift in eschatological expectations that took place after the resurrection.)

I think it is probably not unfair to Sanders to say that one of his main objectives in writing *Jesus and Judaism* was to make it clear – correcting the misrepresentations of quite a few previous reconstructions – that "Jesus affirmed the value and permanence of the nation of Israel as a nation".⁷⁷ This legitimate interest, however, might have led him to play down the importance of some of the present Kingdom-sayings in the tradition, especially Matt. 12:28/Luke 11:20. In his second Jesus book, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, this concern is less pronounced and consequently Sanders' analysis of the kingdom-language of the tradition is more

balanced. He lists six categories of kingdom-meanings ranging from the Kingdom of God as a present transcendent realm to imminent future expectation, including even a special 'realm' on earth consisting of people dedicated to living according to God's will.⁷⁸ Sanders insists that "it is impossible to reject any of the major categories",⁷⁹ and that the simplest, perhaps even the best view to take is to suppose that Jesus said all these things. Just as the apostle Paul could assign different meanings to the word 'Kingdom' – as something that can be inherited in the future but also as something that does not consist of food and drink – that is, he could indicate that the full revelation of the Kingdom lies in the future but some of its benefits may be experienced already in the present,⁸⁰ a similar possibility of a combination of different senses must not be denied to Jesus. There are, however, certain conclusions drawn from some of Jesus' Kingdom-sayings that Sanders thinks are not legitimate, for example, the idea that the Kingdom can be built or brought in by human effort. It is God's project. Of course, Sanders argues, this does not allow the interpretation that people are merely to wait passively for the arrival of the Kingdom either.⁸¹ Whether the preparation for the Kingdom entails anything apart from personal piety and uprightness is not spelt out.

In all probability, Jesus did not expect the end of the world in the sense of the destruction of the cosmos. He possibly expected a divine transforming miracle comparable to God's intervention at the Red Sea to protect and save Israel.⁸² The problem is that we can never be certain of how literally to take the eschatological material in the gospels, especially because Jesus, in contrast to the graphic visions of some apocalyptic writings (cf. *The War Scroll*) did not give precise descriptions about the coming world.

In this second book Sanders pays much more attention to Jesus' teaching addressed to individuals and in so doing he emphasizes a major difference between Jesus and other eschatologists: "...one of the most striking things about

Jesus is that despite the expectation that the end would soon arrive, and despite the fact that he thought about the coming Kingdom on a large scale, he nevertheless left behind a rich body of teaching that stressed the relationship between individuals and God in the here and now. The future orientation might have led him to be indifferent to individuals: eschatologists often thought of whole blocks of people who would be saved or destroyed at the end, without providing much in the way of spiritual nourishment for the diverse individuals who made up each block."⁸³ Although in Matt. 11:20-22 Jesus warns and threatens whole cities at a time, Sanders says, "this is not what dominates Jesus' message and his view of God's attitude towards humans".⁸⁴ Sanders emphasises the strong element of *value reversal* in Jesus' Kingdom-language, a motif that is strongly connected to God's mercy and Jesus' corresponding demand of God-like perfection from his followers, whose main aspects are mercy and humility.⁸⁵

I think that Sanders' reconstruction of Jesus' message of the Kingdom as presented in *The Historical Figure of Jesus* has a lot to commend it. First of all, Sanders does not gloss over the tensions inherent within the tradition and so his reconstruction reflects the 'messy state of reality'⁸⁶ more faithfully than most of the other reconstructions. Yet at the same time Sanders is not content merely to state that the material is complicated and ambiguous, but does try to provide an interpretive framework for it. According to N.T. Wright in this second book Sanders "comes down on the side of Borg and the others"⁸⁷. I do not agree: merely by drawing out the implications of Jesus' Kingdom message for the community of his followers Sanders does not present Jesus' program as simply a blueprint for human society. The ambiguity concerning the precise relationship between present and future Kingdom is faithfully preserved in Sanders' reconstruction. It seems, however, that the differences Sanders notes between Jesus and other eschatologists do not

reach a critical mass that would imply a change or refinement of the category Sanders places Jesus in.

4.3.2. Dale C. Allison

Published in 1998, Allison's *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* is partly a powerful restatement of the apocalyptic-eschatological portrait of Jesus and partly a refutation of the non-eschatological image as presented in some of the recent studies of the historical Jesus. For this reason I have decided to include Allison in this final chapter, although he is not one of the contributors I originally selected.

Allison defines 'eschatology' as having to do with "history's consummation and the events directly associated with it, such as the resurrection and final judgment".⁸⁸ The term 'apocalyptic', on the other hand, designates "a cluster of eschatological themes and expectations – cosmic cataclysm, resurrection of the dead, universal judgment, heavenly redeemer figures etc. – that developed, often in association with a belief in a near end, in postexilic Judaism".⁸⁹

Allison is convinced that the narrative that can be fashioned on the basis of the testimony of the Synoptics about an eschatological Jesus with an apocalyptic scenario is more persuasive than competing narratives that cannot account for a lot of the data in the gospel tradition. This narrative is not merely the result of an analysis of individual items in the tradition; the first step is to find an explanatory model or matrix that helps us in determining the authenticity of these items as well as their interpretation.⁹⁰ The reconstruction proposed by Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, Allison argues, is still the best research program, due to its "simplicity, scope, explanatory power and parallels in the history of religion".⁹¹

One of the most persuasive arguments for Allison in favour of this model is of course the "significant ideological continuity" between John the Baptist

and Jesus and the strongly eschatological character of the early Christian community.⁹² The fact that the community used the interpretative category of the resurrection for what happened at Easter is best explained by supposing that they had foreseen "eschatological suffering followed by eschatological vindication, tribulation followed by resurrection", and after Easter they simply sought "to correlate expectations with circumstances".⁹³ Further evidence is the social and political circumstances in Jesus' time that were ripe for the appearance of a millenarian movement. (Cf. in Acts Gamaliel mentions the Jesus movement together with two other eschatological movements (Theudas and the Egyptian).)⁹⁴ All these pieces of evidence, Allison admits, are *circumstantial*, yet very strong. So strong, in fact, that if some of the sayings in the gospel tradition suggest some other conclusion, this circumstantial evidence is to be preferred, because of the possibility that the early Christians expunged from the tradition "the eschatological elements in order to protect Jesus from being viewed as a false prophet".⁹⁵

This general matrix, Allison suggests, helps us interpret the particulars: the major themes and motifs in the Jesus tradition. Themes that point to Jesus' moral radicalism, for example, attest to the relationship of his moral demands to his belief in a near end.⁹⁶ Not only thematic considerations, but also some of the formal literary features of gospel passages can assist us in determining which pieces of the tradition go back to Jesus. Allison uses 'indices' instead of 'criteria'⁹⁷ because these pointers merely suggest and do not demonstrate the authenticity of the passage in question. His first 'index' seems to me the most questionable: "the plausibility that a complex or topic originated with Jesus is increased if it illumines or is illuminated by the paradigm of Jesus as eschatological⁹⁸ prophet, or known biographical information about him, or one of the major themes...". This index does seem to contain a dangerous level of circularity: the interpretation of a given complex reinforces the methodological premise, while the latter guides the interpretation itself. Allison is

aware of this, but he argues that a certain amount of circularity is unavoidable in historical reasoning. The important thing is to enter the circle at the right point: from the direction of the general framework. (I concede that the individual level of tolerance of circularity may vary from person to person; however, when this principle of the priority of the general paradigm is combined with a dismissal of contradictory evidence, I think that the circle is nothing less than vicious.)

A more promising index is what Allison calls the 'index of intertextual linkage': "The plausibility that a complex or topic originated with Jesus is increased if it has inconspicuous or unexpected connections with a complex already thought, on other grounds, to be dominical".⁹⁹ For example, Q 12: 51-53 has an interesting structural parallel in Mark 10:45: both are 'I came' sayings, containing a contrast with an eschatological expectation, a surprising antithesis, a reference to suffering and a warrant from Scripture.

The third element in Allison's argument is what he considers the striking parallels of the Jesus tradition with world-wide millenarian movements.¹⁰⁰ Among other things, it expected suffering and/or catastrophe in the near future, imagined redemption through a reversal of values, was egalitarian, divided people into two camps (the saved and the unsaved), broke taboos and was nativistic (the kingdom of God meant an implicit endorsement of Jewish kingship and an implicit rejection of the kingdom of Caesar). The political passivity of the movement was the result of its expectation of a divinely wrought deliverance. (These cross-cultural parallels seem problematic for at least two reasons: firstly, because in most cases the parallels come from historical periods and movements where the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage cannot be excluded¹⁰¹. The other problem is that many of the characteristics Allison enumerates as allegedly common to Christianity and millenarian movements can in fact be given a different interpretation. For example,

to regard Jesus' political attitude as 'passive' (and to contrast it with violent revolution as the only other option) seems quite an outdated view.¹⁰²

Allison's method produces an image of Jesus that he calls "thoroughly religious and thoroughly Jewish".¹⁰³ The most important contribution of Allison's new book to the present discussion is his convincing argument that the older 'eschatological' consensus has not in fact been overthrown by the efforts of the non-eschatological 'school'. He is not sufficiently aware, however, of the problems concerning the eschatological model, the reasons for the 'deep unease'¹⁰⁴ many scholars feel towards 'thoroughgoing eschatology'. He basically presents the classic Schweitzerian scenario, supplemented with cross-cultural parallels, but without the sensitivity to the differences between the thinking of apocalyptic eschatologists and Jesus evidenced by Sanders' reconstruction in *The Historical Figure of Jesus*.¹⁰⁵

4.3.3. J.P. Meier

Meier devotes a considerable portion of Volume 2 of *A Marginal Jew* to Jesus' kingdom proclamation and to the question whether it had a primarily future or a primarily present referent. In contrast to most other third questers, he does not believe that the establishment of a general framework should precede or is even possible before the analysis of the key texts. For Meier, the best way to approach the question of Jesus' eschatological stance is an exploration of the meanings of the phrase "kingdom of God" in Jesus' usage, a topic which is not just a major theme, but *the* major theme of Jesus' ministry, with a wide range of attestation both of forms and sources.¹⁰⁶

In search of possible antecedents for Jesus' use of the phrase "kingdom of God", Meier surveys the Old Testament with its deuterocanonical/apocryphal books,

the Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran literature and the Targums.¹⁰⁷ He concludes, that although the precise phrase is missing from the Old Testament, and it occurs infrequently in Jewish literature in general, the symbol of God ruling as king was well known at the time of Jesus, and it evoked, in different contexts, the different aspects of the whole mythic story of Israel and her God. In the "intertestamental" period, the symbol was often connected with eschatological hopes of the restoration of Israel.

Nevertheless, it was not the dominant symbol of Israel's faith, and thus Jesus' choice of this theme reflects a conscious, personal decision on his part, and is therefore "a privileged way of entering into Jesus' message".¹⁰⁸ Still, in his reworking of the symbol, Jesus had to operate under certain constraints¹⁰⁹, namely the connotations of the symbol of God's kingly rule as primarily the salvation of Israel through a future definitive act of God. If Jesus had wanted to delete or negate these connotations completely, Meier argues, he would have made this departure from his religious tradition completely clear.¹¹⁰

The future kingdom-sayings

In a conscious departure from the general practice of using Jesus' parables of the kingdom as the primary means of establishing the meaning of the expression, Meier mainly analyses other key sayings containing the phrase. In his view, the openness of parables to multiple interpretations as well as the fact that many of them are found in only one independent source means that it is advisable to establish a general framework on the basis of other passages before a full-scale treatment of the parables themselves.¹¹¹ It is also important that the chosen sayings have both solid arguments in favour of their authenticity and an unambiguous future reference.¹¹²

The pertinent "future-kingdom" texts are the second petition of the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:10/Luke 11:2), the saying about drinking wine in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25), the saying about reclining at table with Abraham in the kingdom (Matt. 8: 11-12/Luke 13:28-29) and the Beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3-12/Luke 6:20-23). All these passages are thoroughly examined, using the traditional criteria of authenticity. I have selected the analysis of the saying about drinking wine in the kingdom as an illustration of how illuminating Meier's oft criticized "atomistic" approach can be.

The passage – Mark 14:25 – *coheres* with the well-attested motif of table-fellowship in Jesus' ministry, as a meal that is a preparation for and a foretaste of the coming banquet in the kingdom of God¹¹³. The saying also *coheres in form* with other sayings that have Jesus authoritatively utter a prophecy about the end-time (e.g. Mark 9:1)¹¹⁴. At the same time, it is completely *discontinuous* with the christology, soteriology or eschatology of the early church: what is central is not the person of Jesus, but the final triumph of God; Jesus does not mediate access to the eschatological banquet, rather, he is one of the saved. His hope is that the kingdom's arrival will somehow bring him out of death.¹¹⁵ That this lack of christological allusion was perceived as embarrassing for some in the early church is borne out by the fact that Matthew ¹¹⁶ subtly alters the wording. Matt. 26:29 alters the phrase to "in the kingdom of my Father" and adds "with you" to make up for the lack of the communitarian dimension in Mark. Finally, the saying also *coheres* with the eschatology of the Lord's Prayer (previously analysed by Meier) in pointing to Jesus' expectation of the future coming of the kingdom¹¹⁷ - even at the end of his life.

The other passages add further nuances to this basic picture. Matt. 8: 11-12 brings together the motifs of the eschatological pilgrimage of the Gentiles and the eschatological banquet in the kingdom of God. The presence of the patriarchs

indicates that the kingdom here is not only future, but also in some way discontinuous with the present world.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, this motif indicates not only transcendence of death but also the regathering of Israel from all times as well as from all places.¹¹⁹ Still, this scenario lacks the characteristics of full-blown apocalyptic; in this, Meier discovers an important similarity between the eschatology of Jesus and John the Baptist: both are eschatological prophets with *some* apocalyptic traits, yet without all the elements of the apocalyptic worldview.¹²⁰ Finally, the Beatitudes reflect the motif of eschatological reversal; a revolution brought about by God on the last day.¹²¹

In a separate section, Meier tries to answer the question whether Jesus gave a deadline for the Kingdom. He enumerates several factors in favour of the imminence of the Kingdom: the general note of urgency and anticipation throughout the gospels, the general argument from the historical continuity between John the Baptist and Jesus, as well as Jesus and the early church. Furthermore, the parables of growth and contrast imply a relatively near consummation, "organically tied to the present".¹²² Nevertheless, Meier detects a "strange vagueness" about the exact time of the kingdom's coming, both in Jesus' and the Baptist's proclamation. This lack of timetable or speculation contributes to the tension of the message; the kingdom might arrive at any time soon.¹²³

As far as the three passages that do provide some kind of a time limit – Matt. 10:23, Mark 13:30, Mark 9:1 – are concerned, they all turn out to be inauthentic, despite the fact that all of them satisfy the criterion of *embarrassment* since all of them are unfulfilled prophecies.¹²⁴ Mark 9:1, placed as it is before the episode of the Transfiguration, is probably intended by Mark to be viewed as having been fulfilled, at least partially, in that event. The setting for the saying is likely to be the first generation of the church that has experienced a crisis of faith caused by the

death of some of its members. Whereas Jesus proclaimed the imminent coming of the kingdom "as a motivating force of radical conversion in the present moment", this verse "would have the effect of cutting the ground out from under the urgency".¹²⁵ The time limit set by the saying in Mark 13:30, positioned at the conclusion of the list of apocalyptic signs, is immediately contradicted by a following verse (verse 32) about the unknowability of the time of the end, even the Son's ignorance about it. Since Meier considers the latter verse authentic, he questions the authenticity of 13:30.¹²⁶ It does not mean, however, that these three sayings should be considered inventions of future eschatology out of whole cloth, rather, they are attempts at adjusting Jesus' imminent eschatology to a later situation.¹²⁷

Meier concludes that in their reticence both Jesus and John the Baptist are closer to traditional Old Testament prophecy than to full-blown apocalyptic. They both accept the hope of Israel - widespread in the postexilic period - that God would bring the present world to an end in the near future, but neither of them sets a timetable for it.¹²⁸

In his analysis of the future kingdom-sayings, Meier rejects unequivocally the non-eschatological interpretation of Jesus' message. He maintains, at the same time, that an exclusive concentration on the future aspects of the kingdom also distorts the evidence.

The Kingdom Already Present

The question whether it is possible to combine the future aspects of Jesus' kingdom proclamation with its present ones and if it is, in what way, must not be allowed to interfere with the prior problem of weighing the evidence, Meier maintains. Therefore, he collects what he regards as the most significant present

kingdom sayings in the tradition. The passages examined here are the "second Baptist block" (Matt. 11: 2-19 parr), the saying concerning Jesus' exorcisms (Matt. 12:28/Luke 11:20), the parable about despoiling the "strong man" (Mark 3: 27/Luke 11:21-22), Luke 17: 20-21, the "Markan summary" of 1:15 and a number of allied sayings.

The conversation between Jesus and John the Baptist – which Meier regards as basically authentic (one of the indicators is that John's expression, "the coming one", does not occur either in pre-Christian Judaism or in Q as a set title for the Messiah)¹²⁹ - suggests a shift in emphasis from John's ministry. Jesus points to the public record of his ministry, whose climactic action is the proclamation of the good news to the poor (cf. Isa. 6:1)

The focus of the comparison between John and a member in the kingdom is, again, not Jesus, but anyone – the least – who is in the kingdom *now*. (The saying cannot refer to the future, because in that case John would be excluded from the kingdom – an impossibility considering Jesus' unequivocally high estimation of John.) This passage, according to Meier, expresses "the astounding notion that what is in essence transcendent, eternal, invisible and almighty, has somehow become temporal, visible and vulnerable in Jesus' ministry".¹³⁰ The difference between the presence of the kingdom and its future coming is that it is ambiguous, being a powerful source of joy as well as a sign of contradiction, subject to violent opposition.¹³¹

Matt. 12:28/Luke 11:20, with the direct reference to Exod. 8:15 (the finger of God) indicates that Jesus, in his ministry as an exorcist, places himself alongside Moses and Aaron as someone "empowered by God to perform symbolic miracles connected with Israel's liberation from slavery".¹³² This episode is an example of Jesus' unique combination of apocalyptic eschatology with the actual

performance of exorcisms.¹³³ Mark 3:27/Luke 11:21-22, the parable about despoiling the 'strong man' has a related theme: it refers to the victory over Satan as demonstrated in Jesus' exorcisms.¹³⁴

In relation to Jesus' sayings about the fulfilment of eschatological hopes Meier notes the "intriguing and puzzling dialectic" that characterises them (and that Jesus shares, to a certain extent, with John the Baptist): while Jesus implicitly claims to be the central figure of the eschatological drama, he puts the kingdom in the centre, "leaving the precise relationship between his person and the kingdom he proclaims unclear".¹³⁵

The simplest and most natural interpretation of Luke 11:20, in coherence with the previous examples, is that Jesus presents his exorcisms as proof that the kingdom of God is in some sense present.¹³⁶

In an ingenious reconstruction of Luke 17: 20-21 (after removing what he considers Luke's redactional activity, he ends up with a combination of 20b and 21b: The kingdom of God is not coming with close observation, For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst) Meier interprets the saying as follows: obvious indicators of the kingdom, like exorcisms and healings, "should turn people's eyes away from futile apocalyptic calculations towards the kingdom".¹³⁷

With respect to Mark 1:15, which in Meier's eyes has a good chance of coming from Jesus, he suggests that it is unwise to use this saying as a key text either in support of a future or a present interpretation. Due to the ambiguous nature of this metaphor (has the kingdom drawn near in the spatial or the temporal sense?), "when faced with that alternative, our logion turns into a sphinx".¹³⁸ The Beatitude on Eyewitnesses, (Matt. 13: 16-17/Luke 10: 23-24), on the other hand, unambiguously refers to an eschatological reversal which is *definitely present and not future*.

In conclusion, Meier suggests that 'present' sayings are not as numerous or prominent in the gospel tradition as 'future' sayings. This may or may not represent the relative weight Jesus himself gave to these dimensions. Still, there are a sufficient number of present sayings – which show a remarkable coherence – to question an exclusively future interpretation of the kingdom. The precise relationship between these two groups of sayings, however, remains unspecified. Meier is aware of the fact that "merely to establish both does not *ipso facto* provide an explanation of how this paradox holds true".¹³⁹ At the same time, he is not satisfied with the usual attempts to explain the relationship between present and future, the 'slogans and set phrases' of 'already-not yet' or 'dawning'. Yet the fact that Jesus chose to employ the phrase 'kingdom of God' for both, makes it incumbent upon the interpreter to offer a solution, however incomplete. Meier is more reluctant than most to do so, due to his wariness of large interpretative paradigms. He suggests that the paradoxical juxtaposition of present and future in Jesus' kingdom proclamation reflects the organic link between the two. It is an indication that "the eschatological drama has already begun", and the events of Jesus' ministry are a "partial and preliminary realisation of God's kingly rule which would soon be displayed in full force".¹⁴⁰

The greatest merit of Meier's contribution is that he refuses to simplify the complicated picture that emerges from the gospel tradition of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God. Also, his analysis is characterised by a more careful exegesis of individual passages than those found in the books of the other third questers. It is not quite clear, however, how he would interpret the parables of Jesus after the detailed analysis of the other kingdom sayings. One of his conclusions is that the clue to the ambiguity concerning Jesus' kingdom proclamation lies in the *nature* of the kingdom. If this is true, then the interpretation of the kingdom-

parables seems unavoidable. Yet this would pose problems for Meier, who, similarly to other representatives of the eschatological option, is intent on stressing the transcendental nature of the kingdom and its exclusively divine quality. Many of the kingdom-parables, however, depict and are at the same time designed to invoke the human response to God's gift of the kingdom.

Meier, who considers his own work "militantly untheological"¹⁴¹, might consider the task of interpreting the simultaneous presence of present and future kingdom sayings as being outside the competence of a historian: a task for the theologian.

"It must be acknowledged that simultaneous assertion that "the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21; present eschatology), or that salvation is simultaneously "already and not yet" present, appears at face value to be self-contradictory. The combination of such statements inevitably raises suspicion of seeking to have things both ways, of formulating claims in a manner which a priori immunizes them from possible refutation and is thus ideological in the pejorative sense. To address such problems, further theological reflection on the meaning of Christian interpretations of history and eschatology is necessary to clarify the differences in the use of the term "kingdom of God" in the two apparently contradictory statements. The presence of both dimensions in the preaching of Jesus remains, however, a presupposition of such considerations."¹⁴²

4.3.4. N. T. Wright

In the first book of his multi-volume project¹⁴³ Wright carefully prepares his reconstruction of Jesus' eschatology by employing the 'pincer movement' of surveying the Jewish apocalyptic literature preceding or contemporaneous with Jesus

as well as the rewriting of this overarching story within early Christianity. He maintains that there is no reason to think that first century Jews understood the language of apocalyptic in a literal sense: "they knew a good metaphor when they saw one". They were also aware of the fact that apocalyptic "used cosmic imagery to bring out the full theological significance of cataclysmic socio-political events." Apocalyptic was far from being simply the message concerning the attainment of post-mortem bliss, or the threat of a cosmic meltdown¹⁴⁴, or the critique of "a world radically and profoundly corrupt and corrupting"¹⁴⁵. Instead, it was a way of referring to a climactic event in Israel's history within the space-time universe and investing that historical event with a theological significance by using a set of end-of-the-world metaphors. This understanding of apocalyptic, Wright suggests, "retains the merits of both Schweitzer's view and the 'social critique' view, while eliminating their outstanding weaknesses".¹⁴⁶ These metaphors do have a concrete referent, only it is an end-of-the-world event in the sense of Israel's real return from exile. Wright emphasises the revolutionary nature of apocalyptic writings, which becomes clear once we understand them in their proper context.

As far as the Christian reappropriation of Jewish apocalyptic is concerned, Wright thinks that it retained the basic elements of Jewish eschatology, while at the same time substantially rethinking and redefining the apocalyptic schema. This redefinition did not consist of "substituting the so-called 'vertical eschatology' of private piety or revelation or indeed a world-denying social critique for the so-called 'horizontal eschatology' of Jewish thought, instead, the early Christians felt themselves to be the protagonists in a new act in the drama of the creator god and his people."¹⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 15: 20-28, the earliest Christian writing about the kingdom provides the detailed chronological explanation: the creator god is completing, through the Messiah, the restoration of the whole creation. This restoration has already begun, so the kingdom is in a sense already present, while in

another sense it is still future.¹⁴⁸ The early Christians proclaimed that the decisive event had already happened, and the consummation would be "simply the final outworking of the now-past event" of Jesus' death and resurrection.¹⁴⁹

In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Wright argues that this redefinition of the symbolic world of Israel, which is at once so Jewish, since it retains the shape and the basic elements of the Jewish story, yet at the same time "so innocent of national and ethnic worldview-markers", started well before AD 70, with Jesus himself.¹⁵⁰

What were the events within space-time history that Jesus interpreted as the coming of the kingdom? Just as John the Baptist, who "insisted on redrawing the boundaries of Israel" by admitting only those who had repented, Jesus also predicted judgement on Jerusalem and the nation for rejecting his message of peace and choosing war against Rome.¹⁵¹ He used Old Testament images of judgement on pagan nations to condemn the Galilean towns that had not listened to his offer of the way of peace (Matt. 10: 14-15).¹⁵² Since prophecy demands to be tested by events, Jesus predicted that he and his people would be vindicated when Jerusalem suffers the consequences of her nationalistic ambition and violence. In this way, the destruction of Jerusalem and the rescue of his own disciples will be "the vindication of what Jesus had been saying throughout his ministry".¹⁵³

The cornerstone of Wright's reconstruction is Mark 13; a discourse that he thinks originates with Jesus. Here Jesus describes Jerusalem using the Old Testament imagery that depicted Babylon. He announces the shocking conclusion of Israel's story: Jesus' coming to Jerusalem as the vindicated, rightful king is the coming of the Son of Man when the temple and the city is destroyed and Jesus is finally vindicated "both as a prophet and as the actual replacement of the temple".¹⁵⁴ Wright suggests that the most natural reading of Jesus' parousia is to understand it as "his actual enthronement as king consequent upon the dethronement of the

present powers that were occupying the holy city".¹⁵⁵ In Mark 13:12, Jesus takes up the prophecy of Micah 7, 2-10 about the patient endurance of the true people of God and applies it to his own disciples: the rescue of Israel now means the rescue of his own disciples who are now the true Israel. "Their vindication will come when the city that has opposed Jesus is destroyed."¹⁵⁶ The fall of Jerusalem-Babylon is an earth-shattering event that can only be described by images of cosmic darkness. Jesus exhorts his disciples to flee from the apostate city: he will "die at the hands of the Roman authorities on the charge of being a Jewish rebel, but they are not to do so. No mistaken sense of loyalty must sway them into trying to bring in the kingdom after all by means of the sword."¹⁵⁷

Thus the coming of the Son of Man is also to be understood metaphorically: it means the defeat of the enemies of the true people of God as well as the vindication of the true people themselves. "As a prophet, Jesus staked his reputation on his prediction of the temple's fall within a generation, and when it fell, he would be vindicated."¹⁵⁸ The second aspect of this vindication is the rescue of his people; since Jesus made the temple redundant, its fall would be a sign for them that the "promises to Zion are now transferred to Jesus and his people".¹⁵⁹

In his popular book *Who Was Jesus?* Wright summarises his interpretation of Jesus' kingdom preaching as follows:

"...apocalyptic language meant that Israel was on the verge of the great turn-around of the ages. The long night of exile was coming to an end; the great day of liberation was dawning. Israel was like a bride on the eve of her wedding day, or a prisoner on the verge of release after a mammoth sentence. Everything, everything is going to be different from now on. The world will be a different place. The birds will sound as though they're singing a different song. That's how apocalyptic language works. It invests ordinary events with their total significance. The monsters will be destroyed; the man will be exalted. "The Son of man will come on the clouds

with power and great glory." Israel will be vindicated, and her oppressors will trouble her no more. Jesus picked up this massive expectation – *and applied it to himself*. He had welcomed sinners and outcasts into the Kingdom, calmly and quietly implying that this kingdom was being redefined around himself...¹⁶⁰

One of the key elements of Wright's thesis, related to the theme of eschatology, is his insistence that for Jesus, as for the majority of his contemporaries, the controlling metanarrative was Israel's story of exile and return, because they considered themselves still in exile. Wright convincingly demonstrates the widespread occurrence of the motif from the post-exilic prophets to the later Jewish writings. It is not beyond doubt, however, that this was indeed the controlling story and not *one* of the rich metaphor-systems by which the Judaisms of the period expressed their predicament and hopes. We have seen that Marcus Borg argues for there being three fundamental stories in the biblical tradition for the expression of the relationship between God and the people: the exodus story, the exile story and the priestly story of sin and forgiveness, each of which expresses one particular aspect of the relationship. It is quite natural that at the time of foreign domination the exile story with its note of hope of eventual return should become important. Yet here, too, some finer distinctions should be made. "It is one thing to recognise that Jews of the Diaspora, or texts like Tobit and Baruch written from a diaspora context, thought of Israel as still scattered among the nations and of the full gathering of Israel back to the land (Deut. 30:5) as still to be achieved."¹⁶¹ This is not necessarily the case for Jews living in Israel. To mention only one important datum: the Tamid was sacrificed daily in the Temple as a special symbol of God's presence among his people.¹⁶² It is still less certain that the exile story can be applied as a *leitmotif* to Jesus himself: "the lack of clear reference to the motif should be a good deal more worrying to Wright than it is".¹⁶³

Wright's reconstruction could be regarded as the mirror image of Crossan's. In both cases, every aspect of Jesus' eschatology receives its proper place in a perfectly coherent system; there are no loose ends. (Wright, in reply to one of his critics, admits that he considers loose ends a sign of weakness.)¹⁶⁴ The difference is that while Crossan pays the price of the essential simplicity of his Jesus-portrait by positing complicated conspiracy theories that he thinks explain the eschatology of the early Christians, Wright's essentially simple picture of the early church requires a correspondingly complicated picture of Jesus. Since the early followers merely implemented what they had learned from Jesus, all of the Old Testament allusions and their applications are carefully orchestrated by Jesus himself.¹⁶⁵ Quite apart from the inherent implausibility of this level of scribal awareness on the part of Jesus, the end result of this reconstruction is strangely disappointing. Despite describing in detail the richness and variety of Jewish apocalyptic literature, Wright does not take into consideration the fact that this language is capable of denoting different realities in different writings, possibly even within one writing as well. He rejects 'vertical eschatology' or the spatial dimensions of apocalyptic as later misrepresentations of the original intention of referring to historical events. He criticises other scholars for flattening out the rich metaphorical language, yet he himself flattens out its referential aspect when he narrows it down to the historical event of Jerusalem's fall (not to mention the serious theological problems inherent in such a reconstruction). He insists that apocalyptic language was understood metaphorically, yet how plausible is this suggestion in view of Jewish hopes and aspirations in the first century? The enthusiastic followers of eschatological prophets like Theudas or the Egyptian probably expected a *literal* fulfilment of their hopes, as did the apostle Paul, according to 1 Thess. 4: 13-18. Dale C. Allison argues convincingly that if Paul evidently understood the scenario depicted in these verses

as a literal occurrence in the future, and not as a symbolic prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction, an appeal to metaphor when interpreting the closely related Mark 13: 24-27 seems out of place.¹⁶⁶ Also, the elaborate interrelationship of metaphors as the key to Jesus' message seems artificial. "First-century Judaism and Jesus' mission transmute into huge abstractions; everything mediates metaphor. We, of course, are capable of reading these texts like this, as Wright has just demonstrated. But, *in principle*, what evidence can we have that first-century Jews "unconsciously" or "subconsciously" thought this way too?" – asks Paula Fredriksen.¹⁶⁷

Wright's interpretation of Mark 13 as an actual discourse of Jesus is questionable. To voice one's doubts about the historicity of this chapter in its final composition does not necessarily mean, as Wright suggests, that one wants to rescue Jesus from apocalyptic, "as though the latter were an unwelcome Jewish intrusion into his pure, timeless message",¹⁶⁸ after all, Mark 13 is not the only apocalyptic passage in the gospel tradition. However, when Wright argues that choosing the Mount of Olives as the setting of the discourse was intended by Jesus as an allusion to Zechariah 14: 4-5 (Israel's God standing on the Mount of Olives), and when he considers the fact that in Mark Jesus is sitting and not standing as a sign that Mark did not deliberately invent the episode to fulfil Zechariah, this argument seems seriously strained.¹⁶⁹

Wright argues forcefully that in first century Judaism apocalyptic language was understood metaphorically and was used to invest historical events with theological significance. If that is so, and if for Jesus and the early Christians it meant that the destruction of Jerusalem signified the vindication of the true people of Israel (i.e. themselves), what was the concrete significance of this vindication? In his response to Crossan's criticism, Wright makes it clear that he does not confuse literalness with concreteness; that is, he does not say that Jesus' metaphorically apocalyptic language, while being nonliteral, does not have a concrete referent.¹⁷⁰

This concrete reference, however, remains opaque, just as the consequences of this vindication in the life of the community do. In other words, Wright's construal of the aims of Jesus and their realisation seem strangely inconsequential. "How was God to become king at Jesus' death and resurrection, or in the destruction of Jerusalem and the flight of Christians therefrom, in a way he was not before?" - is an obvious question to ask. It is in this connection that we must also inquire about the social implications of Wright's hypothesis. He rightly criticises other scholars for narrowing down Jesus' message to its social dimensions and interpreting it merely as a setting in motion of a social experiment.¹⁷¹ Taking note of this kind of extreme interpretation does not invalidate, however, the need to wrestle with the abundant material in the synoptic tradition that is concerned with the ethical aspects of Jesus' kingdom announcement. In response to Crossan's criticism, Wright maintains that "I believe that my historical reading of Jesus has the capacity to ground and energise a theology of political action in a way that far outstrips anything that can be deduced from the subversive teachings and actions of a wandering quasi-Cynic."¹⁷² If that is so, it would perhaps been important to spell out the connections more explicitly. This is the great promise of the next volume in Wright's project; a detailed outworking of the alternative inherent in Jesus' eschatological pronouncement so beautifully expressed by Wright: "...the kings of the world, and for that matter the revolutionaries of the world, behave one way, but Jesus modelled and taught a radically different way, both of royalty and revolution."¹⁷³

4.4. Conclusion

There seem to be two especially contentious issues within the current debate. One is the actual nature and function of apocalyptic language, the other the

relationship between apocalyptic and sapiential modes of thinking in the Jesus tradition.

The nature and function of apocalyptic language

Richard Horsley has repeatedly drawn attention to the way current historical reconstructions are still determined by such modern synthetic constructs as 'apocalypticism', especially within the 'non-eschatological' camp. Authors like Mack or Crossan seem to be battling against "the modern construct of 'apocalypticism, rather than a viewpoint identifiable in any particular ancient Jewish text or in the Gospel of Mark".¹⁷⁴ This 'essentialism' then leads some scholars to present Jesus as an apocalyptic visionary because of the presence of certain apocalyptic motifs in the gospel tradition (e.g. Allison), while others labour mightily "to save Jesus from any implication of having been a fanatical 'enthusiast'".¹⁷⁵ There is also confusion with regard to the perspective on history that is expressed in apocalyptic writings as well as the social location of their authors. Apocalypticists are sometimes accused of having been alienated from history and having abdicated historical responsibility for the life of a community, and at other times apocalyptic writings are viewed as the inspiration for fanatical revolutionary action.¹⁷⁶ Frequently the strong ties that connect apocalyptic literature to earlier forms of prophetic eschatology are also ignored. Horsley stresses the organic continuity between the two, based on the unchanged emphasis on and hope for God's redemptive or judgmental action. Apocalyptic images elaborate the tradition of prophetic dream-visions. The changed symbolism reflects the changed historical situation (the introduction of new symbolic elements such as the resurrection or the dualism of divine and demonic forces reflect an attempt to "comprehend and make manageable an otherwise intolerable situation"), but the basic conviction, shared with the biblical prophets, that "God was

ultimately in control of history", remained.¹⁷⁷ Far from being alienated from history, apocalyptic writers assigned cosmic significance to their own historical situation. The function of apocalyptic language was not to help people to "retreat into a vision of higher reality"; on the contrary, it helped them "to remain steadfast in their traditions and to resist systematic attempts to suppress them".¹⁷⁸ Horsley also emphasises the liberating role of apocalyptic, visionary imagery with its 'creative envisioning' of a new heaven and new earth, a situation free from the dehumanising influences of the present age. Thus an essential function of apocalyptic literature is "a critical demystifying of the pretensions and practices of the established order, which, instead of a divinely appointed status quo, appears as the battleground of demonic forces".¹⁷⁹ This critical function of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology was inherited by Christian eschatology. Helmut Koester draws attention to a fundamental feature of post-Easter Christian message: for the disciples, Jesus' execution by the established world order resulted in their "denial of all values of a world order that had made Jesus its victim" and the proclamation of a new world "in which the victim was vindicated".¹⁸⁰ This message meant negating and challenging the 'realised' political eschatology of Roman imperial power. Far from being a quietistic flight from the real world, this eschatological challenge might have been more dangerously subversive than a Cynic-like world-negating subversive wisdom. In this respect, Horsley points out a basic deficiency in the cynic wisdom model: for Mack and Crossan, what is determinative is the cultural sphere, "separate from concrete political-economic relations".¹⁸¹ The Cynic Jesus is a counter-*cultural* figure teaching an alternative lifestyle, perhaps questioning or ridiculing the status quo but leaving its basic *structures* unchanged. (Crossan's characterisation of Jesus' followers as a group of Galilean hippies expresses perfectly both the counter-cultural nature and the innocuousness of this portrait.)

Apart from this direct historical relevance of apocalyptic language, it could have several other functions in various circumstances. Some apocalyptic writings (e.g. 4 Ezra 7: 30-31) undoubtedly contain the motif of a cosmological end of the world, yet the notion of 'the end' more often seems to refer to a time of crisis or the end of a period in history rather than a definitive end.¹⁸² Already at the time of the classical prophets, the hope for transition sometimes included a hope for new institutions modelled on the old ones.¹⁸³ Apocalyptic might also have entailed a visionary experience of heavenly realities or a hope for individual or communal elevation to this heavenly sphere: a vertical/spatial transition rather than a horizontal/temporal one.¹⁸⁴ These different aspects of apocalyptic literature demonstrate that they do not express a one-dimensional worldview: emphasis on human history does not exclude individual hope for the transcendence of death or visionary 'depth experiences': "hope is by nature of things unseen, which can only be figuratively or symbolically expressed; no one symbol can exhaust the potentialities of the hope".¹⁸⁵ J. J. Collins draws attention to a very important consequence of this world-view: by concentrating on the future hope, it gave people the courage to live justly in the present; "one of the main factors which inhibits a free response to righteousness is the fear of personal loss, of pursuing an unprofitable course of action." The expectation of a form of life that transcends death "gives the freedom necessary to respond freely to the demands of righteousness and so attain the present depth experience in life".¹⁸⁶

This plurality of meanings and expectations expressed in apocalyptic writings should be taken into consideration when the question of Jesus' eschatology is discussed. Most often, however, one or two aspects of this phenomenon are selected, a few motifs are distilled from the literature, and this construct is then either contrasted with Jesus' message or is used to illuminate it. The problem is aggravated by the fact that apocalyptic eschatology is far from 'consistent'; due to

the nature of the realities it describes it uses 'tensive symbols' that defy exact and unambiguous definition. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of apocalyptic I have found is an amalgamation of what Paul Hanson defined separately as prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology: "... I understand apocalyptic quite simply as a cosmic vision of reality that announces a divine plan for creation's deliverance from bondage. Apocalyptic is a "disclosure" or "revelation", first witnessed by an announcing prophet, which is unfolding in the realm of spirit and which is, at the present moment, bringing human history to the threshold of a great reversal. It thereby delegitimizes the present superior position of those groups in opposition to the envisioned divine purpose."¹⁸⁷ Apocalyptic imagery does not have as its primary referent "the modern, scientific image of the natural world, the life of which will come to a close with the arrival of God's kingdom. However, it takes on profound meaning once "world" is conceived as a symbolic universe, which simultaneously reflects and determines the reality of human culture."¹⁸⁸ By announcing the imminent end of the present world, by proclaiming the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God, Jesus reversed "the value judgements of a world that held up its own construction of reality as ultimate".¹⁸⁹

(Undoubtedly, some forms of apocalyptic thinking – both ancient and contemporary – might be seen as escapist rather than historically responsible. Apocalyptic scenarios that envisage the removal of the believers from earth to heaven to escape the nuclear catastrophe do not encourage people to deal with problems constructively. However, as Adela Yarbro Collins points out, even in these extreme cases the underlying causes and function of this worldview should be assessed. "We must ask what it is about our society which causes people to rely on politically irresponsible forms of apocalyptic before we try to convert them to more responsible forms."¹⁹⁰)

Wisdom and Apocalyptic

As I have mentioned above, the current portraits of a 'non-eschatological' Jesus may be criticised not only for their outdated definition of the term 'apocalyptic' but for the related mistake of treating 'apocalyptic' and 'wisdom' as dichotomous entities. They appear in these reconstructions as "separate ancient Jewish cultural movements, which even had their own distinctive forms of sayings".¹⁹¹

This position is particularly clearly summarised and elucidated in Stephen J. Patterson's essay "The End of Apocalypse: Rethinking the Eschatological Jesus"¹⁹². He argues that recent research into the gospel tradition produced several results that do not fit into the dominant scholarly paradigm of the eschatological Jesus. First and foremost is the recognition that Q was not originally an apocalyptic document but rather a collection of wisdom speeches. The so-called 'Q apocalypse' represents "a moment of frustration in the history of the Q community itself, when it realised that the wisdom of Jesus was not having as great an impact as it had originally hoped".¹⁹³ This leaves only Paul and Mark as sources for an apocalyptic Jesus. Since Paul is of limited help in reconstructing the historical Jesus, we are left with Mark. Yet Mark must have known and may have been influenced by the later edition of Q that predates it by a decade. We also have to consider the Gospel of Thomas, which contains parallels both to Q₁ and Q₂. The parallels with the latter, however, lack the apocalyptic motifs, just as the Thomas parallels with Mark do. This means that the Q and Mark versions of these sayings have been secondarily apocalypticised.¹⁹⁴ (Interestingly, it is John Kloppenborg, one of the main proponents of this approach to Q, who draws attention to its long theological pedigree: he describes how already Harnack hailed Q as "an independent basis for reconstituting

the purely religious and ethical elements of Jesus' message, that had been suppressed in Mark and overlaid with apocalypticism".¹⁹⁵⁾

One of the major problems with this theory is the use of the Gospel of Thomas as comparative material. The fact that Thomas lacks apocalyptic elements is not necessarily proof that it faithfully reflects the earliest Jesus tradition. Helmut Koester points out that Thomas actually "presupposes, and criticises, a tradition of eschatological sayings of Jesus".¹⁹⁶ This controversy might have resulted in Thomas revising sayings that originally had apocalyptic features. As far as the layering of Q and the assignment of these layers to various communities are concerned, this argument is also problematic. Apart from the intrinsic improbability that such a complicated community development could actually take place within a very short period of time, it is not even the case that the earliest layer is entirely non-eschatological. Dale C. Allison notes that even this layer contains sayings which "seem to presuppose the final judgement to be at hand."¹⁹⁷

The sharp distinction between wisdom-type and apocalyptic-type material in the gospel tradition disregards both the literary precedents within Jewish literature that combine these two types, and also ignores the presence of sayings that cannot readily be classified as either sapiential or apocalyptic. James G. Williams suggests that many of the kingdom sayings in the gospels could easily be accommodated to a great number of pictures. One of his examples is Q 6: 20, which might be regarded as having a clear future eschatological reference (e.g. Meier, Allison), but could also be interpreted as "a blessing upon those who are world-renouncing, who have become ascetics for the sake of attaining an inner freedom, a 'kingdom of God' within the soul".¹⁹⁸ (Williams does not mention this, but the same indeterminacy might apply to sayings about seeking or entering the kingdom. Scholars – depending on their prior stance – classify these as clearly referring to a future or an always-available present kingdom.) According to Williams, there is a

middle range of sayings that cannot clearly be specified as either wisdom and apocalyptic; and the existence of these kingdom sayings "might be an implicit commentary on the extreme alternatives". The kingdom is neither 'here' nor 'there' – but somewhere in the 'midst' of what we are looking for and looking at."¹⁹⁹

There is a type of logion within the Gospel of Thomas that seems to corroborate the finding that there are sayings that do not fit neatly into either of the categories. This tradition takes the form of binary logia expressing a future reversal of binary antitheses.²⁰⁰ (Since Thomas shows a redactional tendency to transform such binary sayings into sayings about a primordial unity, those that preserve the antithesis have a good claim to come from an earlier period.) For example, the saying about the first and the last is found in a wisdom context in Thomas, but in an apocalyptic/eschatological one in Mark and Q. The core meaning common to both is the theme of reversal. Even if the apocalyptic features in the Q and Mark contexts are secondary, the eschatological orientation of the sayings is indubitable even in Thomas. They confirm the picture of the historical Jesus "as an eschatological preacher proclaiming a coming kingdom and a coming reversal".²⁰¹

The incompatibility of sapiential and apocalyptic modes of thinking may be also questioned by looking at the *origins* of both. Jonathan Z. Smith argues that both these are essentially scribal phenomena²⁰² that reflect the paradigmatic thought of the scribe which is "both pragmatic and speculative". Smith defines apocalypticism as "wisdom lacking a royal patron": the shift toward apocalyptic occurs when native divine kingship ceases and "all decisive historical action and initiative has been transferred from the human to the divine realm".²⁰³ (Of course, Smith's argument that apocalypticism (and wisdom) is "a learned rather than a popular religious phenomenon"²⁰⁴ poses problems for historical Jesus research. It is precisely the speculative elements that characterise so many apocalyptic writings that are largely missing from Jesus' kingdom-language, together with the emphasis on divine

vengeance. We have to consider the possibility both that Jesus might have *deleted*²⁰⁵ some of the earlier associations of kingdom-talk and that the early church might have reintroduced some of them. This possibility, of course, is not the same as positing complicated conspiracy theories about how the simple ethical message of Jesus was later burdened with apocalyptic.)

What seems clear, however, is that it is only through an examination of the particular historical situation and the texts themselves is it possible to examine the relationship between wisdom and apocalyptic in the gospel tradition, rather than positing these *a priori* as separate constructs and even separate cultural movements.

Other Issues

The discussion about the eschatology of Jesus in the third quest has revolved around the question of timing. To a certain extent, this is a natural consequence of the recognition that the individualistic, existential reinterpretation of eschatology has proved inadequate. Evidently, after the demise of this attempt to make sense of apocalyptic language, the alternatives had to be more sharply posed. This polarisation has, however, resulted in neglecting the other factors of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. One of the symptoms of this is the reluctance, among proponents of the eschatological Jesus, to discuss the parables. They argue that the interpretation of the parables depends on one's prior assumptions to such a degree that they cannot be used in a reconstruction of Jesus' eschatology.²⁰⁶ This seems, however, not quite the case: even if the interpretation of the parables can be very subjective, there are certain fundamental aspects that they should retain in any reading. Many of the parables of the kingdom could be considered "a typology of human defensive postures against the coming of God's reign" and as such they "encourage people to forego unnecessary self-imposed hindrances".²⁰⁷ In other

words, even if they talk about a future kingdom, they do not advocate a passive human stance in view of its coming.²⁰⁸ Although Sanders and Meier acknowledge that Jesus' language of the kingdom is multi-layered, and that the exact relationships between the different aspects are hard to define, they concentrate too one-sidedly on the futurity of the kingdom to incorporate this recognition in their reconstructions. As a result, the relationship between ethics and eschatology remains unresolved in these portraits.

Within the non-eschatological camp, the desire to set Jesus apart from various forms of Jewish apocalyptic has meant an over-simplification of this worldview as well as a disregard for its continuities with biblical prophecy. A. E. Harvey argues that an important key to understanding the nature of biblical prophecy is the fact that the prophets "invested the present with meaning by setting it under the judgement of an imminent future".²⁰⁹ In this way they strongly associated the future with the moral choices made by people in the present. (Harvey draws attention to the fact that Paul argues in the same way in Rom. 8:19: he presents the destiny of the natural order as being "dependent upon a new moral/religious order among men".²¹⁰ The same emphasis on the need to respond to the crisis of the hour is present in Jesus' kingdom teaching.) As far as the question of imminence is concerned, Harvey suggests (in contrast to most interpreters), that the key to Jesus' understanding of it lies in Mark 9:1. By providing the indeterminate time-scale of one generation, Jesus avoided the two extremes (that seem to dominate the current debate!) of "total mobilisation" and "ever-present possibility".²¹¹ (Interestingly, Bruce Malina's findings about the Mediterranean perception of time seem to corroborate Harvey's proposal. Malina suggests that in this worldview what is potential or forthcoming has an immediate and organic connection to the present. Time is not viewed primarily quantitatively, but qualitatively: what counts is the 'kairos': the appointed time. The most natural time-span is that of a generation.²¹²) The primary

and constant feature of the future kingdom in the gospel tradition is *suddenness* rather than imminence. The fact that Jesus' expectation in Mark 9:1 was in fact mistaken, Harvey argues, did not create an insurmountable difficulty for the early Christians. The validity of the message depended "not on the timing of its future fulfilment, but on the validity of its interpretation of the present in the light of an imminent end".²¹³ The presence of both wisdom and prophetic material in the gospel tradition does not reflect a 'metaphysical' tension between present and future, rather, it reflects "the extraordinary ability of Jesus to give teaching which is sometimes appropriate to normal routine, sometimes to the exceptional demands of an emergency".²¹⁴

This analysis, though not without its problems (even if we accept that Jesus' message was subject to this prophetic constraint, this does not in itself answer the question of how literally he intended the language of imminence to be taken), seems to do justice to more aspects of Jesus' kingdom proclamation than some of the more recent reconstructions with their one-sided concentration on either the future or the present. This does not mean, however, that all the current portraits are equally wide of the mark. The nuanced eschatological portraits of J. P. Meier and E. P. Sanders present a 'better research program'²¹⁵ than the non-eschatological ones. The latter have to excise too much material from the 'authentic' Jesus tradition in order to rid it of all the eschatological elements. This, however, seriously undermines the plausibility of the hypothesis itself. To use Dale Allison's expression: "One can only amputate so much before the patient is killed."²¹⁶

There are many factors that contribute to the fact that the subject of eschatology sparks off the most heated debates within the third quest. The most obvious one is the polarisation of Jesus portraits along the ideological or theological positions of the interpreters. In a sense, all or at least most of the current reconstructions aim to have Jesus authenticate their own particular visions of the

future. The complicated, sometimes ambiguous kingdom-language within the tradition as well as the many competing construals of the historical situation it was used in makes this area of research especially suitable for waging ideological battles. To be able to pinpoint this particular aspect of Jesus' career is all the more important because "whereas human consciousness can always shape its relationship to the past rationally, it is only possible to a limited degree in relation to the future....In respect of the future, in our experience we remain tied to mythical structures: the future moves like a horizon (occupied by anxieties and hopes) and always remains the same distance away. Therefore today *we still have a quasi-mythical relation to it*. The expectation of the kingdom of God could also move with the whole of the history of Christianity as a constant horizon."²¹⁷ (italics mine)

In Chapter 3 I suggested that the treatment of eschatology within the third quest suffers from the "fallacy of the counterquestion": scholars are unduly influenced by a desire to find arguments against the opposing view to be able to concentrate on the issues at hand. This concentration leads to oversimplified alternatives on both sides. The explanation of the radical ethic of the gospel tradition by the "eschatological camp" as an "interim ethic" is deeply unsatisfactory. Denying any kind of apocalyptic eschatology to Jesus, however, does not rectify matters. William Loader argues that Crossan does not pay sufficient attention to a variant of apocalyptic eschatology that he calls the "theocentric model". As opposed to the millenarian model, this type of apocalyptic eschatology espouses a "positive eschatological hope which generates not only expectation but also an agenda for life, here and now. If my vision of the reign God is soon to bring includes radical commensality, then how can it be otherwise than that this vision informs my life now? It is this same God in whom I hope and whose will is to be done....The vision dictates the agenda for now."²¹⁸

As far as the exact timing and the manner of the coming of the kingdom is concerned, it seems clear that *Jesus left loose ends*. The fact that many in later church history tried to reduce the richness of eschatological hope and "to change its focus away from transformation of present reality to hope for the other side of bifurcated reality, in the realm of the spirit and the immaterial"²¹⁹, does not justify attempts to project this tendency back into the gospel tradition and fight it there.

1 Edith M Humphrey "Will the Reader Understand? Apocalypse as Veil or Vision in Recent Historical-Jesus Research" In: *Whose Historical Jesus?* ed. W.E. Arnal & Michel Desjardins, Wilfrid Laurier University Press Ontario, Canada 1997 p. 216.

2 Ben Witherington III *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1995 p. 94.

3 Helmut Koester "Jesus the Victim" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1995) p. 7.

4 Marcus J. Borg *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, PA 1994 p. 83.

5 Quoted in Edith Humphrey, p. 232.

6 *ibid.*

7 T.F. Glasson "Schweitzer's Influence: Blessing or Bane?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 28, 1977 p.296.

8 W. E. Arnal "Making and Re-Making the Jesus Sign: Contemporary Markings on the Body of Christ" In: *Whose Historical Jesus* p. 313.

9 *ibid.* p. 315.

10 John Howard Yoder: *The Politics of Jesus* Paternoster Press, Carlisle 1994, p.5. A classic proponent of this idea was Reinhold Niebuhr in his *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. Within New Testament studies, an example might be J. T. Sanders' *Ethics in the New Testament* (SCM, London, 1975) in which he argues, for example, that the parable of the Good Samaritan can only be interpreted in view of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God as the horizon of the story. Otherwise, "the one who accepts the demand of the parable will either starve to death or wind up a derelict..." In other words, the parable makes sense only on the basis of the belief that "the kingdom is coming so soon that one stands to gain by living as if it were already present." p.9 The classic expression of this aspect of the apocalyptic view is, of course, Schweitzer's: "We have set ourselves free from Jesus' range of ideas..." *Geschichte...* p. 640

11 Sean Freyne "Galilean Questions to Crossan's Mediterranean Jesus" In: Arnal & Desjardins eds.: *Whose Historical Jesus* p. 90. Freyne's essay also demonstrates that stressing the eschatological character of Jesus' work does not necessarily mean the exclusion of a radical social message from it or the denial of the relevance of the latter for Christian ethics.

12 J. M. Robinson's expression quoted in Borg: *Jesus in Contemporary...* p. 69.

13 Richard J. Dillon: "Ravens, Lilies and the Kingdom of God" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, 1991, p. 606.

14 Glasson, p. 302.

15 Bruce Chilton "The Kingdom in Present Discussion" In: *Studying the Historical Jesus* ed. Chilton & Evans Leiden, Brill 1994 p. 256.

16 as noted by Christian Link in "Points of Departure for a Christian Eschatology" In: *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition* ed. Reventlow, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997 p. 98.

17 see Glasson p. 296.

18 Rudolf Bultmann *Jesus and the Word*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1934 p. 41.

19 This survey of the theological history of the problem can be found in Borg's *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, pp. 70-74.

20 *ibid.* p. 73.

21 *ibid.* I find this assertion questionable, because in this way the label "non-eschatological" becomes an all too broad umbrella term, comprising both reconstructions that give other themes besides eschatology an equal or comparable weight (e.g. J.P. Meier or J. Gnilka) and others for whom the non-eschatological character of Jesus is a war-cry against "apocalyptic Christianity" (e.g. Burton Mack). If Borg complains

about the broadening of the meaning of eschatology in mainstream scholarship, a similar complaint could be made about his use of the phrase "non-eschatological".

22 In: *The glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* ed. L.D. Hurst and N.T. Wright, OUP pp.207-17.

23 *ibid.* p. 209.

24 Borg notes, though, that in principle these two intentions need not exclude each other: "even millenarian movements relate themselves to society". p. 211.

25 *ibid.*

26 analysed by Borg in his first book *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*, The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 1984

27 *ibid.* p. 213.

28 Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary...* p. 77.

29 *ibid.* p. 77.

30 *ibid.* p. 78.

31 "An Orthodoxy Reconsidered..." p. 215.

32 *ibid.* p.79.

33 *ibid.* p. 83.

34 Borg does, in fact, remark that Jesus does not 'sound like' some contemporary apocalyptic groups. (p. 83 in *Jesus in Contemporary....*) While this might be a correct impression, it does not carry much weight with respect to Jesus' relationship with first century apocalyptic movements.

35 See Richard J. Dillon's excellent article "Ravens, Lilies and the Kingdom of God" in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, 1991 pp. 605-627. The quotation is from page 608.

36 *ibid.*

37 Although, as we shall see, Mark 9:1 can not only be interpreted as a saying about imminence: J.P. Meier, for example, argues that with the setting of a timetable it actually cuts the ground from under the note of imminence (see below).

38 Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary....* p. 87.

39 *ibid.* p. 89.

40 *Conflict, Holiness and the Politics of Jesus* p. 14.

41 J. D. Crossan *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991 p. 104

42 *ibid.* p. 112

43 *ibid.* p.159

44 *ibid.* 238

45 *ibid.* p. 227

46 *ibid.* p. 212

47 These categories, of course, are far from value-free, objective labels; the binary pairs apocalyptic/sapiential and retainer/peasant act as negative – positive poles.

48 *ibid.* Neither the texts nor the method necessitate these categories and their neat division into 'quadrants'; they seem entirely arbitrary.

49 p. 266

50 p. 277

51 p. 295

52 p. 345

53 This wording is reminiscent of Burton Mack's summary of the meaning of the kingdom: "See how it's done? You can do it also." *The Lost Gospel* p. 79

54 In: *Jesus and Faith: Conversation on the Work of J. D. Crossan* ed. J. Carlsson and R.A. Ludwig, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY 1994 p. 7

55 *ibid.* p. 13

56 *ibid.*

57 *ibid.* p. 19. Although nowhere in his books does Crossan openly engage with the work of other scholars, it is clear in this instance that his – less than nuanced – classification of the narratives about Jesus' deeds as later church creations runs directly counter to the fundamentals of E. P. Sanders' method.

58 In: Hershel Shanks ed.: *The Search for Jesus: Modern Scholarship Looks at the Gospels* Biblical Archeology Society, Washington, DC, 1994 p. 136

59 The expression is J. P. Meier's

60 J. D. Crossan: *The Birth of Christianity* p. 260.

61 *ibid.* p. 275.

62 Richard Horsley: "Innovation in Search of Reorientation" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62/4 1995 p. 1142.

63 Charles R. Strain: "Sapiential Eschatology and Social Transformation" in: *Jesus and Faith* p. 118.

64 E. P. Sanders *Jesus and Judaism* SCM, London, 1985 p. 117.

65 Sanders is one of the few historical Jesus scholars who take note of the diverse functions and meanings of apocalyptic.

66 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 124.

67 *ibid.* p. 131.

68 *ibid.* p. 152.

69 *ibid.* p. 154 Sanders obviously refers to the Bultmannian solution to the paradox and its unsatisfactoriness in terms of the reconstruction of Jesus' situation.

70 Marcus Borg criticizes Sanders for using a circular argument about the linkage of the Temple action and restoration eschatology. The mere fact that "eschaton and new temple are frequently linked within Judaism says nothing directly about Jesus; he may or may not have made the connection, or may have made it in a different way.... If we were confident that Jesus expected a new temple that would physically replace the old one, then we could say that Jesus was operating within the framework of restoration eschatology; but, of course, this is what Sanders is seeking to demonstrate, not something already established." In: *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* p. 76. Borg is quite right to point out that the problem of Jesus' action in the temple is far from straightforward; he forgets, however, that this event is only one among several that Sanders enumerates in support of his argument.

71 E. P. Sanders "Jesus and the Kingdom: The Restoration of Israel and the New People of God" In: *Jesus, the Gospels and the Church* Mercer University Press, Macon, 1988 p. 237.

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- 72 *ibid.*
- 73 *ibid.* p. 237.
- 74 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* p. 228.
- 75 *ibid.*
- 76 *ibid.* 235.
- 77 "Jesus and the Kingdom" p. 238.
- 78 Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* Penguin Books, London 1993 p. 174.
- 79 *ibid.* p. 176.
- 80 *ibid.* p. 178.
- 81 *ibid.* p. 179.
- 82 *ibid.* p. 183.
- 83 *ibid.* p. 193. (So is it possible that there is something in Borg's observation that apocalyptic eschatologists do not 'sound like' Jesus?)
- 84 *ibid.*
- 85 *ibid.* p. 204.
- 86 The expression is J. P. Meier's.
- 87 Wright: *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 95. I have to admit that I have no idea what Wright bases his argument on. Sanders does not present a non-eschatological Jesus in this book any more than in *Jesus and Judaism*.
- 88 Allison p. 34. Note 103.
- 89 *ibid.* note 104.
- 90 *ibid.* p. 36. In this methodological decision Allison obviously follows Sanders.
- 91 *ibid.* p. 38.
- 92 Allison takes issue with Crossan's counter-argument presented in a public debate in which Crossan argued that using the John the Baptist – early community argument is the same as saying that Gandhi was not a pacifist, because he came out of an environment of violence and after he was gone violence ruled. Allison claims that the difference is that whereas there is massive evidence about Gandhi's pacifism, the evidence for a non-eschatological Jesus is nil. (note 119 p. 40) (Allison, I think, oversimplifies matters here: regardless of the amount and nature of the evidence, Crossan's analogy simply demonstrates that it is possible for a creative person to differ substantially from his or her environment. Also, much of the evidence concerning the eschatology of Jesus is equivocal, as Allison himself admits elsewhere.)
- 93 *ibid.* p. 41.
- 94 *ibid.* p. 44.
- 95 *ibid.* p. 44. In stating this principle Allison seems to go beyond Sanders, who, although also thinks "the sayings are treacherous", would not dismiss them in such a dogmatic manner. Also, we might argue, if the early Christians expunged eschatological material in order to save Jesus from being seen as a false prophet, they did a rather poor job, as the number of unfulfilled prophecies in the tradition suggest.
- 96 *ibid.* p. 48. Cf. Schweitzer's 'Interimsethik'
- 97 like Ben Meyer in *The Aims of Jesus*
- 98 *ibid.* p. 52.

99 *ibid.* p. 54.

100 *ibid.* p. 61.

101 Allison himself quotes Bengt Holmberg, who speaks of "the circular reasoning specifically inherent in the attempt to explain the strongly apocalyptic early Christianity with the help of a set of characteristics, i.e. a model, found in strongly apocalyptic movements, which all stand under the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage". (p. 78) Allison dismisses this criticism by mentioning examples of indigenous non-Judeo-Christian millenarianism. He does not pay sufficient attention, however, to the differences between these movements and Christianity (e.g. the fact that many millenarians destroyed their means of livelihood in anticipation of an imminent transformation – a motif quite foreign from early Christian ideas.

102 See Walter Wink's "Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus' Third Way" in: *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, ed. Willard M. Swartley, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992 pp. 102-25.

103 p. 68.

104 B. Chilton's expression

105 For example, he interprets the differences between the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus by suggesting that Jesus considered himself to be "further along the eschatological time line than John" (p. 105). He does not spell out, however, what this 'further along' in fact entails: the time of the eschatological tribulation? But Jesus refers to the liberating events taking place in his ministry. The messianic age? But that is still in the future.

106 Meier, *A Marginal Jew* Volume 2 p. 238. Meier also argues (on p. 250.) that the analysis of kingdom texts is a more promising point of entry into the question of Jesus' eschatology than the more specific problem whether the sayings about the Son of Man as a future eschatological figure go back to Jesus or not. Even if all these sayings prove to be inauthentic, Jesus' message of a future Kingdom can still be established on other grounds.

107 Meier expresses some doubt about the usefulness of the Targums as the hermeneutical key to Jesus' Kingdom-language. He agrees with Bruce Chilton in that the phrase basically means "God come in strength" to save his people and that in both Targum Jonathan and the Gospels it functions as a tensive symbol with flexible time references. At the same time he notes the uncertainties concerning the dating of the Targums as well as the different function of the phrase in the Targums (the desire to avoid anthropomorphism) and the Gospels (Jesus did not shrink from daring anthropomorphism in his "God-talk"). (note 113 p. 287.)

108 p. 265.

109 Meier here uses A. E. Harvey's criterion of "historical constraint". p. 270.

111 note 2 p. 352. Since Volume 3 of Meier's book has not yet been published, it is not wise to prejudge the contents of his analysis of parables. Still, I think that the separation of this analysis from his overall treatment of Jesus' eschatology is unfortunate. At the end of his examination of the kingdom-sayings, he himself notes that "the real answer to the paradox lies in the very nature of the kingdom of God" (p. 452) (and not so much in the time frame). The nature of the kingdom, however, is to a large extent illumined by the parables. At the same time, Meier's observation that the analysis of the parables is often unduly influenced by prior assumptions about the non/eschatological nature of the Kingdom is well founded.

112 For this reason, Meier ignores the so-called "entrance-sayings" which, even if authentic, are problematic because of the difficulty of determining whether they refer to a future or a present Kingdom (or possibly both). (note 5 p. 352.)

113 p. 303.

114 This structure, in turn, reflects a more general biblical pattern of prophesying that a person's death will not take place until some saving event happens (e.g. John 21:23, Luke 2:26 etc.) (p. 307) I have to add, however, that Meier considers Mark 9:1 inauthentic elsewhere.

115 p. 308.

116 *ibid.*

117 p. 309.

118 p. 317.

119 *ibid.*

120 *ibid.*

121 p. 331. Meier insists that Jesus does not have political reform in mind; the Beatitudes make sense only in view of the imminent arrival of the kingdom. Nevertheless, Meier does not want to eliminate the socioeconomic sense of the poverty of "the poor" in favour of a purely religious one.

122 p. 338.

123 p.339.

124 In this regard, Meier notes the limits of the criterion of embarrassment. He also takes note of Schweitzer's uncritical use of Matt. 10:23 in his reconstruction of Jesus' eschatology. (p.341)

125 pp. 342-3. Meier argues, following Ben Meyer and A. E. Harvey, that the function of the emphasis on imminence – for Jesus as well as the OT prophets – was to awaken people to the need for repentance in the present. This argument, however, does not solve the problem of just how literally imminence was understood by Jesus and his audience. Note also that in A. E. Harvey's analysis Mark 9:1 features as a pivotal *authentic* saying.

126 p. 347 It must be noted, however, that these verses can be given an entirely contradictory interpretation. Dale C. Allison, for example, in his *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* p.6 quotes Robert J. Miller on verse 13:32, who finds it "quite believable that early Christians might well have invented this saying as a way of explaining why Jesus had not been more precise in his predictions, or as a way of taking out insurance on his credibility, just in case the End proved tardy."

127 p. 348.

128 p. 349.

129 *ibid.* p.401.

130 *ibid.* p. 403.

131 *ibid.*

132 *ibid.* p. 411. Meier takes issue here with Sanders' interpretation of the verb 'phthano' in this saying. Sander thinks that the verb merely suggests that the kingdom's coming is somehow determined. He uses a parallel from the Testament of Abraham, where the cup of death comes to Abraham, yet he still lives on for 19 more chapters. Meier considers this parallel forced and opts for the plain sense of the aorist: 'has come'.

133 p.416. Meier follows Theissen in drawing attention to this unique aspect of Jesus' career.

134 *ibid.* p. 418.

135 *ibid.* p. 421.

136 p. 473. Meier lists the different ways scholars have attempted to dodge the obvious sense of the saying. Johannes Weiss, for example, argued that Jesus here talks about an event that now exists only in heaven.

137 p. 430.

138 p. 434.

139 p. 451.

140 p. 453. Meier notes that for a first century Jew or Christian this tension was bearable because it existed "beneath the overarching reality of God's supreme, unquestioned and unchanging rule over his creation". (note 230 p. 506.)

142 J. P. Meier "A Marginal Jew - Retrospect and Prospect", in: *Archbishop Gerety Lectures 1992-1993*, Seton hall university, South Orange, N.J. 1993. p. 17.

143 John P. Galvin "From the Humanity of Christ to the Jesus of History: a Paradigm Shift in Catholic Christianity" *Theological Studies* 55, 1994, p.267.

144 N. T. Wright: *The New Testament and the People of God* SPCK, London, 1992 and *Jesus and the Victory of God* SPCK, London, 1996

144 NTPG p. 333.

145 JVG p. 207. The expression is Crossan's

146 JVG p. 209.

147 JVG p. 215. According to a critic of his, one of the weaknesses of Wright's reconstruction is that he pays insufficient attention to the 'vertical' or spatial aspects of Jewish apocalyptic writings. His exclusive concentration on the overarching narrative (the drama with its successive 'acts') causes him to consider only to the temporal aspects of these writings.

148 JVG p. 216.

149 JVG p. 322.

150 JVG. P.219.

151 JVG p. 373.

152 JVG p. 326.

153 JVG p. 338.

154 JVG p. 343.

155 JVG p. 346.

156 JVG p. 348.

157 JVG p. 359.

158 JVG p. 362.

159 JVG. P. 363.

160 N. T. Wright: *Who Was Jesus?* SPCK, London, 1995 p. 100.

161 J. D. G. Dunn's review of Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*, manuscript, p. 4.

162 Maurice Casey: "Where Wright is Wrong: A Critical Review of N. T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 69, 1998. p. 102.

163 J. D. G. Dunn's review p. 4.

164 N. T. Wright "Theology, History and Jesus: A Response to Maurice Casey and Clive Marsh" *JSNT* 69, 1998 p. 107.

165 In her critique of third quest contributions, Paula Fredriksen remarks: "This hypothesis is coherent and parsimonious, offering the simplest explanation so far of the rise of Christianity: Jesus created it." In: "What You See Is What You Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus" *Theology Today* 52, 1995-96 p. 89.

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- 166 Allison p. 160. He also notes that Wright does not discuss the passage in question in *Jesus and the Victory of God*
- 167 Paula Fredriksen: "What You See..." p. 89.
- 168 JVG p. 340.
- 169 I think that Meier's criticism of Schweitzer for his inadequate use of source criticism could with some justification be applied to Wright as well.
- 170 N. T. Wright: "Doing Justice to Jesus: A Response to J. D. Crossan: "What Victory? What God?" SJT Vol. 50, 1997, p. 360.
- 171 Wright's criticism of Crossan, Mack etc. in *Jesus and the Victory of God* Chapter 2
- 172 Wright's response to Crossan p. 367.
- 173 *ibid.* p. 377.
- 174 Richard Horsley "Innovation...." p. 1140.
- 175 Richard Horsley "Q and Jesus: Assumptions, approaches, Analyses" *Semeia* 55, 1992 p. 176.
- 176 Richard Horsley *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence : Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* Harper&Row, San Francisco, 1987 p. 134.
- 177 *ibid.* p. 135.
- 178 *ibid.* p. 139.
- 179 *ibid.* p.144.
- 180 Helmut Koester "Jesus the Victim" p. 9.
- 181 Horsley "Innovation...." p. 1142.
- 182 J.J. Collins "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death" In: *Visionaries and Their Apocalypses* p. 66.
- 183 *ibid.* p. 67.
- 184 *ibid.* p. 73.
- 185 *ibid.* p. 76.
- 186 *ibid.* p. 77.
- 187 David B. Batstone "Jesus, Apocalyptic and World-Transformation" *Theology Today* 49, 1992 p. 385.
- 188 *ibid.* p. 395.
- 189 *ibid.* p. 397.
- 190 Adela Yarbro Collins "Apocalypse and Politics" *Foundations and Facets Forum* 8, 1992 p. 311.
- 191 Horsley "Innovations...." p.1141.
- 192 Stephen J. Patterson: "The End of Apocalypse: Rethinking the Historical Jesus" In: *Theology Today* 52 pp. 29-58.
- 193 *ibid.* p. 34.
- 194 *ibid.* p. 37.
- 195 Leif E. Vaage/John S. Kloppenborg: "Early Christianity, Q and Jesus" *Semeia* 55, 1992 p. 3.

196 Jesus the Victim, p.7 note 16

197 Allison p. 123 His example is Q 6: 20-23, which "draws upon the prophetic Isaiah 61, [and] contrasts present misery – the addressees are poor, hungry and sad – with the future happiness of the kingdom of God. What else but the last judgement, which brings eschatological reversal, can be here in mind?" note 108. p. 123

198 James G. Williams "Neither Here Nor There: Between Wisdom and Apocalyptic in Jesus' Kingdom Sayings" In: *Foundations and Facets Forum* 5,2 1989 p. 20.

199 *ibid.* p. 28.

200 John W. Marshall "The Gospel of Thomas and the Cynic Jesus" In: *Whose Historical Jesus* p. 45.

201 *ibid.* 59.

202 Jonathan Z. Smith: "Wisdom and Apocalyptic" In: *Visionaries* .. p. 106.

203 *ibid.* 113.

204 *ibid.* p. 115.

205 This expression is used by John Riches in *100 Years of New Testament Study* p. 101.

206 "Scholarly interpretation of the parables tends always – and surely rightly – to be a function of a particular view of Jesus' career (and/or of the nature and the purpose of the gospels), rather than a free-standing entity." (N.T. Wright *Jesus and the Victory of God* p. 175, quoted approvingly in Allison p. 128. See also Meier above)

207 Michael Welker "The Reign of God" *Theology Today* 49 1992 p. 513-515.

208 as opposed to e.g. Meier: "Humans cannot bring in the kingdom. They can only wait for it." *Marginal Jew* 2 p. 331

209A. E. Harvey *Jesus and the Constraints of History* Duckworth, London, 1980 p. 73

210 *ibid.* p. 75

211 *ibid.* p. 87

212 Bruce Malina: "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" In: *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* Routledge, London and New York 1996 pp179-216 *passim*

213 Harvey p. 89

214 *ibid.* p. 92

215 Dale Allison's expression

216 Allison p. 35

217 Gerd Theissen/Annette Merz: *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* SCM, London, 1998 p. 278.

219 William Loader: "Simple Choices? A Response to John Dominic Crossan" *Colloquium. The Australia New Zealand Theological Review* 31.2, 1999, pp. 67-47., www.staff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/crossan.htm

220 *ibid.* see also Loader's article "Jesus Left Loose Ends: Reflections on Jesus and The Church *Pacifica* 2, 1989, pp. 210-228."

Conclusion

In the Introduction, I have placed the third quest into the widest possible context: the process of the democratisation of learning, which requires that all participants in a democratic society have equal access to knowledge. For better or for worse, historical Jesus studies have escaped the confines of both the church and the academe; yet a consensus concerning the general contours or rules of the now public debate has not yet emerged. Research is carried out within opposing camps of scholars, who do not agree on the philosophical presuppositions of their historical research and who do not share all the criteria of plausibility concerning the reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

In these circumstances I have attempted to find certain common denominators among the divergent contributions that I selected and that I think represent the main trends within current historical Jesus studies. My main aim was to identify points of convergence on the basis of which an open and public conversation can be carried out among and about these reconstructions.

The obvious solution, spelt out in Chapter 1, was placing the third quest within the broader currents of contemporary history-writing. Apart from the self-definition of historical Jesus scholars as historians first and foremost, another reason for doing so is the fact that their research shares with historiography its dual social function: satisfying the two fundamental human needs for accurate knowledge on the one hand and a sense of personal identity and recognition on the other. Historical Jesus research is strongly tied to the self-understanding of Christian communities, while at the same time it is concerned with particular events occurring at a particular point in history, information about which should be universally accessible.

Chapter 1 showed that it was indeed possible to place third questers within different trends of history-writing: E. P. Sanders and J. P. Meier were classified as "lower-case" historians, while I placed J. D. Crossan between Modernism and Postmodernism, and N. T. Wright against both. It also became clear, however, that the third quest remains an essentially modernist enterprise: despite their differences, scholars like Crossan and Wright, while exhibiting a sensitivity towards the issues raised by Postmodernism, can justifiably be characterised as "upper case" (Modernist) historians in that their reconstructions function to a large extent as ideological critique. Also, ironically, the two third questers who are the most concerned to eliminate dualistic thinking about Jesus and Christianity, Crossan and Wright, have produced the most dualistic portraits.

J. D. Crossan, in his insistence on rescuing "sarcophilic" Christianity from the clutches of the "sarcophobic" variety, has produced a stark contrast between Jesus and his early followers of the Common Sayings (life) Tradition on the one hand and other, especially Pauline strands of Christianity on the other (the death tradition). Quite apart from the fact that this picture involves a degree of distortion of Pauline theology, it also sanitises¹ Jesus' teaching. This time the dark backdrop against which Jesus has to shine is not "normative Judaism" as in the old quest, but "sarcophobic Christianity". The end result, however, is the same: instead of letting Jesus be Jesus, a first century Jew, who might have held - what to us seems - erroneous or even ethically less than impeccable views, he needs to be "a Jesus who could make it with the sophisticated ideologues"² of contemporary movements such as liberation or feminist theology. "This is a form of docetism which too often fails to let Jesus be a first century human being. It is no better than more traditional efforts to find the Chalcedonian Christ on the streets of Capernaum in some literal sense."³

The most obvious example is Crossan's attempt to exonerate Jesus from any ties to apocalyptic eschatology and the "divine vengeance" expressed within it.

I have already had occasion to note that Wright's portrait is the mirror image of Crossan's. Similarly to Crossan, Wright is also concerned to rectify a "damaging dualism", one that he identifies as the Enlightenment's split-level thinking about reality and the consequent compartmentalising of knowledge. Also like Crossan, Wright falls prey to dualistic thinking, but his dark Other is not orthodox Christianity but Western Modernism. Consequently, he also presents Jesus in a docetistic fashion as someone who was in total control of the events of his mission.

Chapter 1 has also shown, however, that the so-called "lower-case" historians are as deeply influenced by their metanarratives as their "upper-case" counterparts. The real differences among the reconstructions are to be found in the concrete, practical decisions scholars make in selecting and evaluating the data as well as the coherence and reasonableness of their argumentation.

For this reason, Chapters 2 and 3 concentrated on the "tools of the trade": Chapter 2 discussed the ways in which the traditional criteria of authenticity have been reworked or discarded in third quest scholarship as well as the new criteria proposed by the questers.

In addition, in Chapter 3 I proposed a number of criteria for the evaluation of third quest reconstructions. I intended these criteria to be general enough to ensure, on the one hand, that they are not unnecessarily biased for or against any of the contributions and on the other, that they are easily accessible by interested non-experts. In establishing my indices of historical reasoning I borrowed some general historiographical principles that I judged to be especially pertinent to historical Jesus research. Finally, by including text-related criteria that are basically improved versions of the traditional criteria of historical criticism, I meant to indicate that I find

the continued use of some form of these criteria indispensable in the study of the historical Jesus.

At the end of Chapter 1 I quote Robert Morgan suggesting the "piecemeal" insertion of the reliable findings of historical research into theological interpretation. I think that the criteria proposed in Chapter 3 make possible a similar piecemeal approach to third quest portraits of Jesus. They may shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of each contribution, and allow the reader to select certain elements or aspects of each without having to accept the whole construction or hypothesis of either.

For example, as far as the methodology of the reconstructions is concerned, there are proposals in each that could be fruitfully combined in a flexible model. Crossan's interdisciplinary matrix has a lot to commend it: the interlocking components of cross-cultural anthropology, Judeo-Roman history and Galilean archaeology may provide a context which could illuminate the text in new and unexpected ways. Of course, the details of each of these components and their integration are where the difficulties lay. The application of cross-cultural anthropology to the world of first century Palestine has not yet been sufficiently worked out. At the level of Judeo-Roman history the model would need to take into account what Wright calls the "controlling Jewish story" and its variants. The fact that Jesus and his followers lived, acted and thought within this story cannot be ignored. In this, the Jewishness of Jesus should receive the emphasis it has had since Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism*, with a careful analysis of Jesus' conflicts with some of his compatriots. The historical reconstruction should also include the study of the available religious roles in first century Palestine (Borg's religious types), with special attention to that of a charismatic prophet. Finally, at the textual level, this "ideal" model would use all the available historical-critical tools (in J. P. Meier's

fashion) to determine the historical plausibility of the sayings and events depicted in the gospel tradition.

Chapter 4 functions, on the one hand, as a test-case for one of the criteria listed in Chapter 3, the fallacy of the counterquestion. It shows that it is the reconstructions that are unduly concerned with an attempt to refute the opposing position that fail to do justice to the richness and complexity of the subject of eschatology. Even within the *oeuvre* of a single scholar, like E. P. Sanders, there is a marked difference between the one-sided view of eschatology he presents in his more polemic *Jesus and Judaism* and his more nuanced later approach in *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. This chapter also demonstrates another historical fallacy, the fallacy of tunnel history, in discussing reconstructions that present apocalyptic and wisdom as totally separate motifs or even generating autonomous movements with no relation to each other.

Not incidentally, it is in this chapter that the relative merits of "lower case history" can be seen. Since it can tolerate indeterminacy and uncertainty better than its upper case counterpart, it is capable of taking note of the "tensive" or conflicting interpretations of eschatology, as the sections on Sanders and Meier show.

In view of the possibilities inherent in many of the portraits we have surveyed, it seems certain that the third quest as a truly interfaith and interdisciplinary venture has hardly yet begun. What has happened so far seems mostly the staking out of particular positions, more often than not defined over against the contrary opinion. Due to the difficulties involved in historical Jesus research as well as the ideological fragmentation of historical Jesus scholarship, no definitive Jesus-portrait has emerged. It seems clear, in fact, that no final word about the historical Jesus is to be expected from the third quest. As J. D. Crossan says, each generation must wrestle with the history of Jesus anew. The real gain of

the third quest has been not so much providing answers, but keeping the old questions alive as well as asking some new ones. It is living with these truly open-ended questions that gives the study of the Jesus of history its freshness and excitement.

¹ The expression is from William Loader's "Simple Choices?" online version

² William Loader: "The Historical Jesus Puzzle" in: *Colloquium. The Australia and New Zealand Theological Review*. 30.2. 1998, pp. 123-151. www.staff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/hjesus.htm

³ *ibid.*

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